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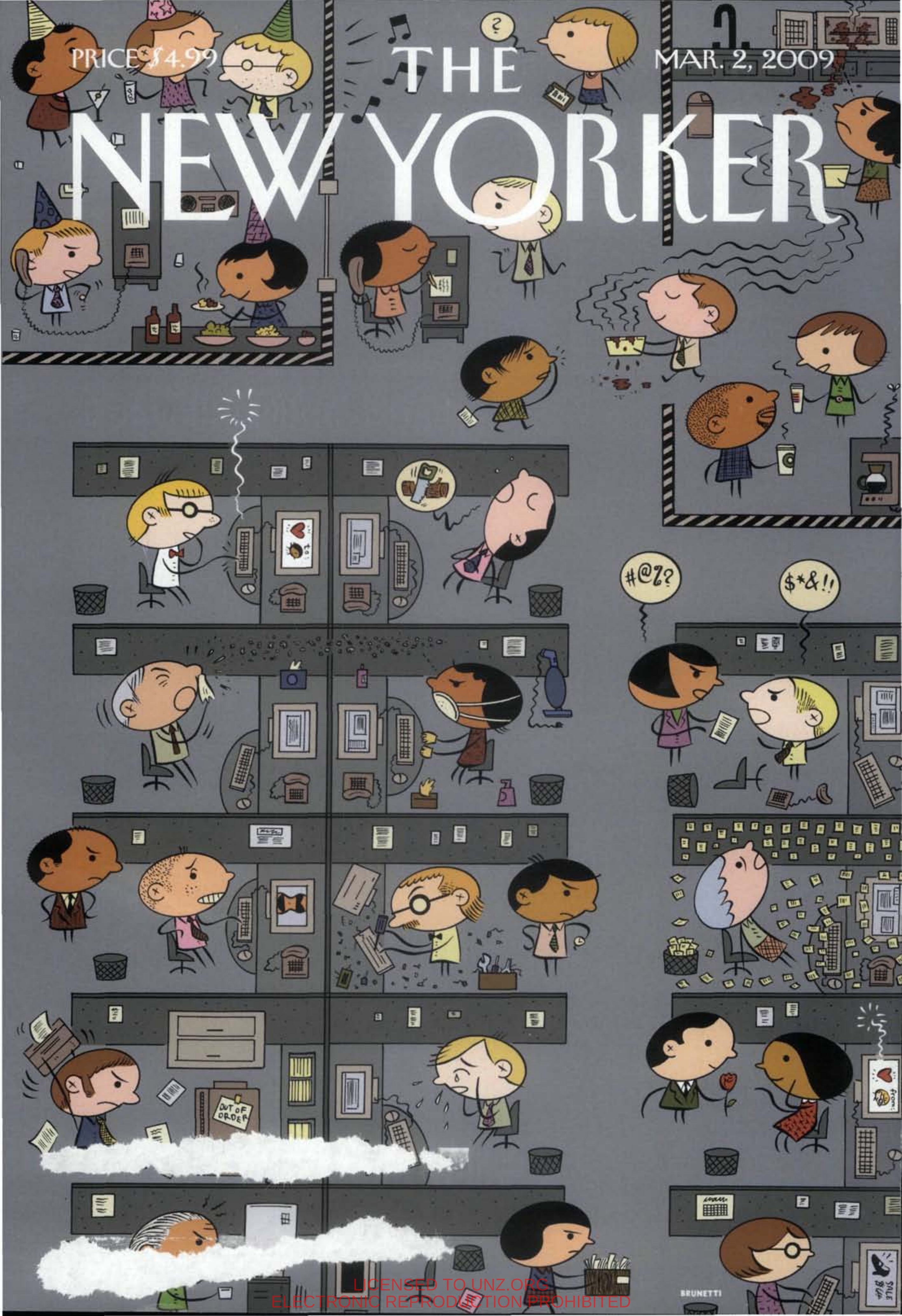
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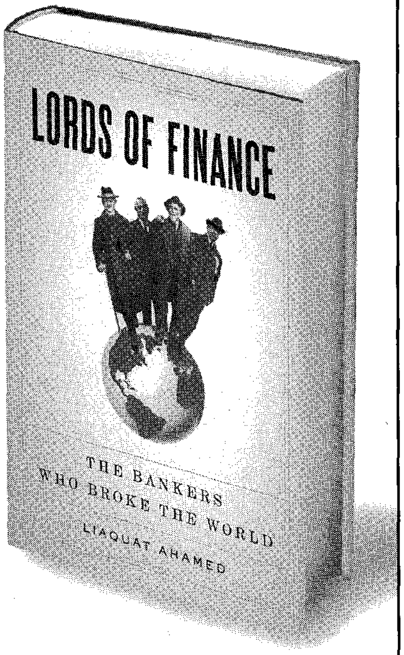

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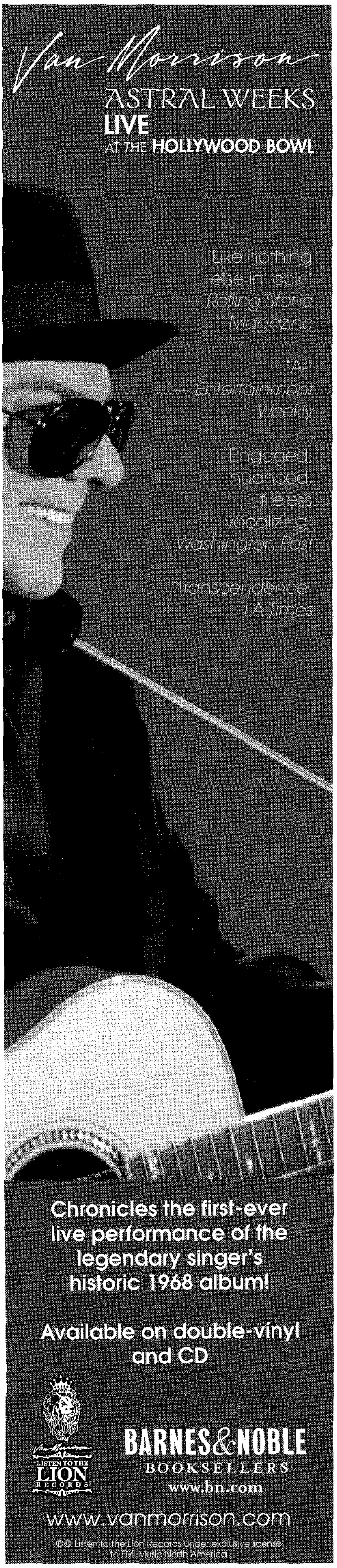

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Rebecca Mead ("The Actress," p. 52) is a staff writer and the author of "One Perfect Day: The Selling of the American Wedding."

Martin Schoeller (Photograph, p. 52) has a new book of photographs, "Martin Schoeller," which has just been published. His portrait photography is included in a show currently at the National Portrait Gallery in Washington, D.C.

Leonard Cohen (Poem, p. 44) is a musician, poet, and writer. His most recent collection of poems, "Book of Longing," is available in paperback, as is the rerelease of "Let Us Compare Mythologies."

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Hilton Als (The Theatre, p. 72) holds the Joan Leiman Jacobson Professorship in Non-Fiction Writing at Smith College.

THIS WEEK ON NEWYORKER.COM

Audio slide show: *Steve Coll* in Kashmir, with photographs by *Ami Vitale.* / Audio: *Ariel Levy* on the Van Dykes. / The Political Scene, a weekly conversation hosted by *Dorothy Wickenden.* / Video: Gabriel Byrne and Grizzly Bear at The New Yorker Speakeasy. / The Book Club reads "Revolutionary Road." / The Front Row, *Richard Brody's* new blog about movies, plus the Book Bench, the Cartoon Lounge, and posts by *Hendrik Hertzberg, George Packer, James Surowiecki,* and *Sasha Frere-Jones.* / A complete archive of every issue, back to 1925. / Animated cartoons and the caption contest.

THE MAIL

WORD GAMES

Judith Thurman, in describing Scrabble, calls its scoring system a work of "finesse and calculation" ("Spreading the Word," January 19th). I would argue that it needs to be adjusted for inflation. The original scoring system was developed according to "educated English usage" in the nineteen-thirties, but the current Scrabble word list admits words far beyond that usage. As the word list has grown, certain letters have become overvalued and others undervalued. "X," an eight-point letter, is now far more easily played than "C," a three-point letter. When "za" and "qi" were added to the official word list a few years ago, no adjustment was made to the ten-point values of the "Z" and "Q" tiles. The result is that the current game encourages players to exploit the inefficiencies of an outdated scoring system. It also increases the role of luck: the player who draws the "X" is virtually guaranteed a big play. Meanwhile, the fifty-point bonus for using all seven tiles, what was once a home run, now seems like a ground-rule double. If the scoring was recalibrated to the current word lists, we might get to play Scrabble with the finesse of its original points system.

Matthew Butterick
Los Angeles, Calif.

Our family Scrabble set has "best" scores written in the box lid that date to 1951, including those for a variation my daughters and I invented almost forty years ago. We were inspired by the suggestion, sometimes credited to George Bernard Shaw, that "ghoti" spells "fish" (pronouncing the "gh" as in trough, the "o" as in women, and the "ti" as in nation); all the rules of phonics and syllabification apply, but you cannot spell any word in the usual way. It may drive the purists crazy, but we had a lot of fun mystifying Scrabble kibbitzers over the years, and came up with many hilarious letter combinations.

A. R. (Pete) Palmer
Boulder, Colo.

I believe that I would have trounced Thurman with my own high score on the word "quixo[t]ic." It spanned two triple-word scores, with "X" on a double-letter score, and used all seven tiles. My mother was my opponent, and her reaction was to accuse me of cheating, and to toss the board. Although my mother, now ninety-six, prefers Bingo, when we visit she will still play Scrabble, and still accuse me of cheating.

Patricia Francis
Charlottesville, Va.

SELLING CINEMA

Tad Friend, in describing the way that movies are pitched to their audience, spoke to Adam Fogelson, a Universal Studios advertising executive whose father, Andrew, had the same job thirty years ago; marketing movies today, Adam says, is "a totally different activity from what my father did" ("The Cobra," January 19th). He meant in the sophistication of techniques. But marketing is different also in its power over the production process. When I ran advertising and publicity at Columbia Pictures in the late nineteen-seventies, the marketing team worked for the production team. The studio chief and his head of production decided what movies they would make, along with their budgets and cast. We marketers were handed movies and told to sell them. Those production executives chose movies because they loved the stories and believed in the talent, without slavish reference to target audience and high concept. Their movies were indisputably more varied and complex, artistic and controversial, and they made money. Marketing is a hugely important part of the movie business. But, by becoming so dominant, it has taken the focus off what really matters—passion.

Robert Cort
Los Angeles, Calif.

•

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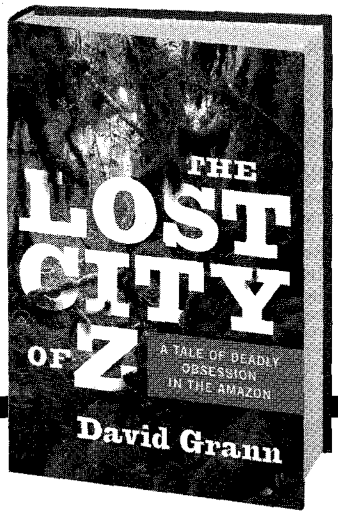

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Classical Theatre of Harlem's "Three Sisters." Photograph by Yola Monakhov.

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

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THIS WEEK

THE THEATRE
BOYS WILL BE BOYS

James Gandolfini, Hope Davis, Jeff Daniels, and Marcia Gay Harden star in the latest play by Yasmina Reza, "God of Carnage," a comedy that centers on the parents of two eleven-year-old boys, one of whom hit the other at school. Matthew Warchus directs, at the Bernard B. Jacobs. (See page 8.)

NIGHT LIFE
GOLDFINGER

In February of 1959, Thelonious Monk appeared at Town Hall with an all-star ensemble to play Hall Overton's ingenious orchestrations of his work. It was the first time Monk's intensely personal small-group compositions had been performed by a large ensemble. The trumpeter Charles Tolliver, who attended the show as a teen-ager, and the pianist Jason Moran return to the scene to lead separate concerts celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the historic event. (See page 10.)

ART
MULTIPLE CHOICE

The German artist Martin Kippenberger, a self-mythologizer on a par with Warhol and Beuys, blazed a trail through sculpture, painting, photography, performance, and installation—and his reputation has only burned brighter since his death, in 1997, at the age of forty-four. MOMA considers his legacy in "Martin Kippenberger: The Problem Perspective." (See page 10.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
TULLY TIME

Lincoln Center offers a rich set of orchestral, operatic, and chamber-music performances to celebrate the reopening of Alice Tully Hall, including concerts by the London Philharmonic and the Bang on a Can All-Stars. (See page 13.)

MOVIES
REAL CUT-UPS

Alongside its "Documentary Fortnight 2009" series, MOMA offers the editor Helen van Dongen's collaborations with the documentary filmmakers Robert Flaherty and Joris Ivens, including "The Spanish Earth," from 1937, with commentary by Ernest Hemingway. (See page 16.)

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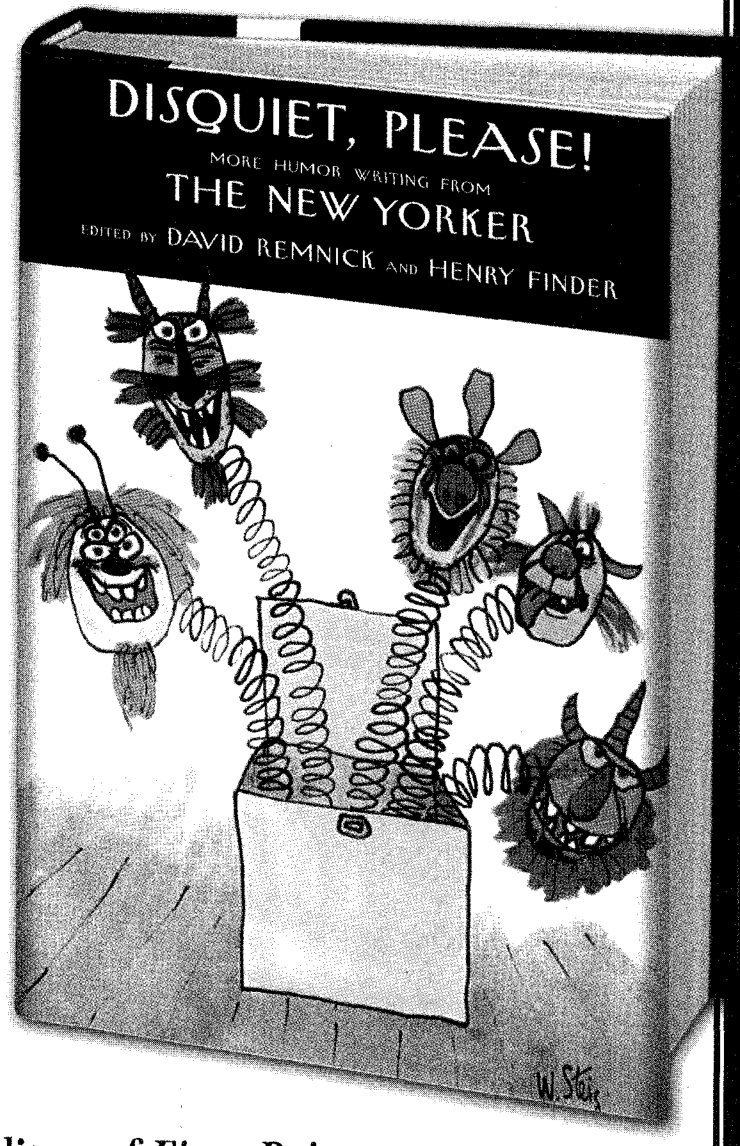
AND MANY OTHERS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THE THEATRE
OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

BLITHE SPIRIT
Angela Lansbury, Jayne Atkinson, Christine Ebersole, Simon Jones, Deborah Rush, and Rupert Everett star in Noël Coward's comedy from 1945. Michael Blakemore directs. Previews begin Feb. 26. (Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.)

DISTRACTED
Cynthia Nixon stars in Lisa Loomer's comic drama, about a mother whose son may have attention-deficit disorder. Mark Brokaw directs the Roundabout Theatre Company production. In previews. (Laura Pels, 111 W. 46th St. 212-719-1300.)

GATES OF GOLD
Kent Paul directs a new drama by Frank McGuinness, about the contentious relationship between the founders of Dublin's Gate Theatre. In previews. Opens March 1. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

GOD OF CARNAGE
The latest play by Yasmina Reza ("Art"), which opened in London last year, directed by Matthew Warchus, about two sets of parents who convene to discuss the bad behavior of their children. James Gandolfini, Jeff Daniels, Hope Davis, and Marcia Gay Harden star. Previews begin Feb. 28. (Jacobs, 242 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

THE GOOD NEGRO
Tracey Scott Wilson wrote this play, about black leaders in the American civil-rights movement in the sixties. Liesl Tommy directs, at the Public. Previews begin March 3. (425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555.)

GUYS AND DOLLS
Oliver Platt, Craig Bierko, Kate Jennings Grant, and Lauren Graham star, with music and lyrics by Frank Loesser and a book by Jo Swerling and Abe Burrows. Des McAnuff directs. In previews. Opens March 1. (Nederlander, 208 W. 41st St. 212-307-4100.)

HAPPINESS
A musical directed and choreographed by Susan Stroman, with a book by John Weidman, music by Scott Frankel, and lyrics by Michael Korie, about New Yorkers trapped on a subway train. Previews begin Feb. 27. (Mitzi E. Newhouse, 150 W. 65th St. 212-239-6200.)

HEROES
The Keen Company presents the New York première of Tom Stoppard's translation of the comedy by Gérald Sibleyras, about a group of retired French First World War soldiers living in a veterans' home in 1959. John Cullum, Jonathan Hogan, and Ron Holgate star. In previews. (Clurman, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

HUMOR ABUSE
Manhattan Theatre Club presents a one-man show co-written by and starring Lorenzo Pisoni, about his experience as the youngest member of the Bay Area's Pickle Family Circus. Erica Schmidt, who co-wrote, directs. In previews. (City Center Stage II, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212.)

IMPRESSIONISM
Jeremy Irons and Joan Allen star in this new play by Michael Jacobs, about the relationship between a photojournalist and a gallery owner. Jack O'Brien directs. Previews begin Feb. 26. (Schoenfeld, 236 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

KASPAR HAUSER
The Flea commissioned this play by Elizabeth Swados and Erin Courtney, about a boy found in Nuremberg, Germany, in 1828, who had lived in a dungeon his entire life. In previews. Opens Feb. 28. (41 White St. 212-352-3101.)

OUR TOWN
David Cromer ("Adding Machine") directs the Thornton Wilder classic from 1938, and also plays the Stage Manager. In previews. Opens Feb. 26. (Barrow Street Theatre, 27 Barrow St. 212-868-4444.)

ROOMS A ROCK ROMANCE
A musical about two Scottish musicians who fall in love and go on tour together in the nineteen-seventies. Paul Scott Goodman wrote the music and lyrics, Goodman and Miriam Gordon wrote the book, and Scott Schwartz directs. Previews begin Feb. 27. (New World Stages, 340 W. 50th St. 212-239-6200.)

THE SAVANNAH DISPUTATION
The New York première of a play by Evan Smith, about a religious Catholic woman who invites a missionary into her home. Marylouise Burke, Dana Ivey, Reed Birney, and Kellie Overbey star; Walter Bobbie directs. In previews. Opens March 3. (Playwrights Horizons, 416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

TALES OF AN URBAN INDIAN
As part of the Public LAB series, Darrell Dennis wrote this semi-autobiographical one-man show, about a young Native American's life on the reservation and in Vancouver. Herbie Barnes directs. In previews. Opens March 1. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555.)

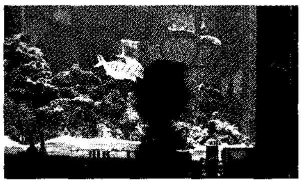
33 VARIATIONS
Jane Fonda, Samantha Mathis, and Colin Hanks star in a new play written and directed by Moisés Kaufman, about a musicologist studying Beethoven's fascination with a waltz. In previews. (O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200.)

WEST SIDE STORY
Arthur Laurents directs the 1957 Bernstein-Sondheim-Robbins musical, for which he wrote the libretto. Matt Cavanaugh and Josefina Scaglione star. In previews. (Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 212-239-6200.)

THE WIDOWING OF MRS. HOLROYD
The Mint presents this 1914 play by D. H. Lawrence, about a middle-class woman who comes to hate her working-class husband. In previews. Opens March 1. (311 W. 43rd St. 212-315-0231.)

ZOOMAN AND THE SIGN
Signature Theatre Company presents this drama by Charles Fuller ("A Soldier's Play"), about one man who terrorizes a community and another man who tries to defend it. Stephen McKinley Henderson directs. Previews begin March 3. (555 W. 42nd St. 212-244-7329.)

TABLES FOR TWO
THE JOHN DORY



NATALIE MATUTSCHOVSKY

85 Tenth Ave., at 15th St. (212-929-4948)—It's been five years since April Bloomfield, a young British chef, introduced New York to the hearty, calorific joys of English gastropub food, with the Spotted Pig, in the West Village. Now comes a fish restaurant, and, with it, the opportunity to discover how amphibious her talent is. Can a chef known for a Roquefort-smothered burger and creative use of offal pay adequate heed to the more delicate flavors of the sea? What happens when you swap triglycerides for omega-3 fatty acids? The jury's still out on this, but the John Dory certainly has the feel of a success. The menu is provocative enough to get foodies interested, and the spectacle, buzz, and flavor draw in the social flotsam of the meatpacking district.

Bloomfield, rather than being reined in by the restaurant's focus, tends to treat fish as she does meat, and her impressive execution and defiant wit mostly carry it off. Arctic char impersonates steak, seared very rare and accompanied with béarnaise sauce and frites; monkfish liver pretends to be foie gras, a whole lobe of it dripping in brown butter and served with brioche toast. In a dish of grilled squid, the sepia tails are basically sausage casings, stuffed with a spicy mix of chorizo and rice. The bold flavors feel supremely confident, but sometimes you wonder if it wouldn't be even more confident to let fish be fish occasionally. The eponymous John Dory, which feeds two, is a case in point, with an overpowering salsa verde. But if you ask for the salsa on the side, the freshness of the fish and the excellence of its preparation—rich, but just short of buttery—become apparent.

The décor, like the food, goes for a more-is-more approach. Nearly every square inch of the room is plastered with piscine decoration, as if it had been hit by a tsunami of seaside souvenirs. The walls are encrusted with garish plastic salmon, mahi-mahi, lobsters, and other creatures of the deep; there are posters of North American fish, Australian fish, and mollusks; there are mirrors whose frames are clusters of shells. An orderly school of remarkably lifelike fishermen's lures are frozen mid-swim in the clear resin countertop of the bar. Behind the bar is a large tank of colorful tropical fish. They're not on the menu, but you begin to fear for their morale. One night, a waiter revealed that, until recently, there had been an eel in the tank that committed suicide by swimming up a filtration tube. (Open Mondays for dinner, Tuesdays through Saturdays for lunch and dinner; starting March 1st, open weekdays for lunch and dinner and weekends for brunch and dinner. Entrées $24-$36.)

—Leo Carey

NOW PLAYING

ASTRONOME: A NIGHT AT THE OPERA
There's no singing in Richard Foreman's new "opera"—a collaboration with the composer John Zorn—or dialogue, unless you count the occasional repetition of the recorded words "Mendel Schwartz" and "stage fright," or the sound of loud retching. There's no plot or recognizable characters. There's just seven actors in capes and dog snouts doing nonsensical things: mindlessly cleaning the wall with a pillow, pulling crumpled paper out of a giant nose with long tongs, masturbating, whipping each other, carrying around a giant snake-like object with a blow-up doll's head. All the while, extremely loud guitar music with little or no melody shrieks and thumps in the background (ear plugs are provided). It's an hour-long punk-rock nightmare meant (if anything is meant at all) to remind us that, though life is neither coherent nor pleasant, it can sometimes be weirdly fun. (Ontological-Hysteric, St. Mark's In-the-Bowery, Second Ave. at 10th St. 212-352-3101.)

CALL CUTTA IN A BOX
Conceived and produced by a trio of German theatre artists operating under the moniker Rimini Protokoll, the show begins with you—the audience member—alone in a spacious white office with a partial view of the Met. A phone rings and the show begins: a call-center agent in Calcutta, roughly eight thousand miles and ten time zones away, coaches you through a series of getting-to-know-you exercises, all the while controlling various elements of your immediate surroundings—the soundtrack, the computer and color printer, the electric teapot. This strange but charming little piece of performance is billed as an "intercontinental phone play," but, if anything, it is an intelligent experiment in transcultural chit-chat, a simulation of an everyday encounter

that is hyper-personalized to disorienting but endearing ends. (Goethe-Institut, 1014 Fifth Ave., at 83rd St. 212-439-8700. Through Feb. 28.)

RUINED
Manhattan Theatre Club and the Goodman Theatre present a drama by Lynn Nottage. Kate Whoriskey directs. (Reviewed in this issue.) (City Center Stage I, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212.)

THE STORY OF MY LIFE
In Neil Bartram and Brian Hill's two-man musical, Will Chase plays Thomas, a best-selling author struggling with writer's block as he attempts to compose a eulogy for his childhood friend Alvin (Malcolm Gets). Fortunately, Alvin, dressed in a floppy beige suit to signify his otherworldliness, is standing by with songs and memories. Through flashbacks, we learn that Thomas blew off the childlike Alvin after moving to the big city, despite basing all of his fiction on their boyhood experiences; we also learn, among other flashes of wisdom, that "years are like snowflakes / that pass in the blink of an eye." The show doesn't get much deeper than that, whether about grief or friendship, though its triteness is nothing if not sincere. (Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

TELEPHONE
The poet Ariana Reines's feverishly imagined, word-drunk play, inspired by Avital Ronell's history "The Telephone Book: Technology, Schizophrenia, Electric Speech," considers the transmogrifying effects of Alexander Graham Bell's invention—its displacement of the body, its coaxing toward silence. Staged rivetingly by Ken Rus Schmoll, the piece unfolds in three parts: an eerie vaudevillian dialogue between Bell (Gibson Frazier) and his assistant, Watson (Matthew Dellapina); a cryptic soliloquy delivered by a psychotic seamstress (the virtuosic Birgit Huppuch), based on one of Carl Jung's patients; and a series of fragmented conversations among silhouetted figures in the age of the cell phone. "I'm here, baby," one of them says, bringing into question where, exactly, the dark "here" of modern human contact lies. (Cherry Lane, 38 Commerce St. 212-352-3101. Through Feb. 28.)

THREE SISTERS
Classical Theatre of Harlem presents the Chekhov play, directed by Christopher McElroen. (Harlem Stage at the Gatehouse, 150 Convent Ave., at 135th St. 212-281-9240.)

UNCLE VANYA
In Austin Pendleton's staging of Chekhov's drama, about a turn-of-the-century Russian family at odds over love and money, Denis O'Hare's Vanya seems less like a lovesick widower than a squirrelly, callow college student. As he lounges around his family's estate, attended by his dutiful niece, Sonya (Mamie Gummer), his perpetual state of ennui is interrupted by the arrival of Sonya's father, the professor Serebryakov (George Morfogen), and his pretty new wife, Yelena (Maggie Gyllenhaal), who slithers through the house with flamboyant nonchalance. The set, by Santo Loquasto, is gorgeously rough-hewn, and highlights of the talented cast include Peter Sarsgaard, who sustains a mysterious air as the country doctor who is too smart for his surroundings, and Gummer, whose movingly fretful Sonya pines so deeply for the doctor. But their performances don't match up with those of O'Hare and Gyllenhaal, whose casual American-style sarcasm and flirting never really lead to sufficiently Chekhovian tragic depths. (Classic Stage Company, 136 E. 13th St. 212-352-3101.)

Also Playing

THE AMERICAN PLAN: Samuel J. Friedman, 261 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200. **AUGUST: OSAGE COUNTY:** Music Box, 239 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **AVENUE Q:** Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **BECKY SHAW:** Second Stage, 307 W. 43rd St. 212-246-4422. **BILLY ELLIOT THE MUSICAL:** Imperial, 249 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **THE CHERRY ORCHARD:** BAM's Harvey Theatre, 651 Fulton St., Brooklyn. 718-636-4100. **THE CRIPPLE OF INISHMAAN:** Atlantic Theatre Company, 336 W. 20th St. 212-279-4200. **GARDEN OF EARTHLY DELIGHTS:** Minetta Lane, 18 Minetta Lane. 212-307-4100. **HEDDA GABLER:** American Airlines Theatre, 227 W. 42nd St. 212-719-1300. **PAL JOEY:** Studio 54, at 254 W. 54th St. 212-719-1300. Through March 1. **SHIPWRECKED! AN ENTERTAINMENT—THE AMAZING ADVENTURES OF LOUIS DE ROUGEMENT (AS TOLD BY HIMSELF):** 59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200. **SHREK THE MUSICAL:** Broadway Theatre, Broadway at 53rd St. 212-239-6200. **SOUTH PACIFIC:** Vivian Beaumont, 150 W. 65th St. 212-239-6200. **THE 39 STEPS:** Helen Hayes, 240 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **YOU'RE WELCOME AMERICA. A FINAL NIGHT WITH GEORGE W BUSH:** Cort, 138 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200.

NIGHT LIFE
ROCK AND POP

BARBÈS
376 9th St., Park Slope, Brooklyn (347-422-0248)—March 3: Last spring, the genre-crossing violinist and composer **Jenny Scheinman** released two albums simultaneously. "Crossing the Field" advanced the elegant amalgam of pop, jazz, and classical instrumentals she has perfected over the past few years, and "Jenny Scheinman" marked her vocal début, a confident, crystalline effort in a country mode. Her Tuesday-evening residency here has recently included collaborations with Bruce Cockburn, Bill Frisell, and Norah Jones. When Scheinman gets a trancelike look in her eyes, focussing on a point miles beyond the back wall, that's when things get interesting.

B. B. KING BLUES CLUB & GRILL
237 W. 42nd St. (212-997-4144)—March 3: **Ian McLagan and the Bump Band.** America's first taste of the Small Faces was 1967's weirdly delicious psychedelic pop hit "Itchycoo Park." They achieved a higher profile when Rod Stewart and Ron Wood joined the band and they changed their name to the Faces. The keyboardist McLagan was there throughout it all, and he carries on the tradition, fronting this outfit, which favors slightly messy rock and R. & B. over finesse. Feb. 27: The soulful blues singer **Robert Cray** hit a commercial zenith twenty-two years ago with his album "Strong Persuader." Since then, he has delivered a string of fine releases full of Memphis grooves and smooth vocals. Feb. 28: A post-Mardi Gras visit from **Buckwheat Zydeco.**

BEACON THEATRE
Broadway at 74th St. (800-745-3000)—March 3-4: Last fall in Los Angeles, the Irish bard **Van Morrison** performed his acclaimed 1968 album, "Astral Weeks," live at the Hollywood Bowl—the first time he has performed the entire album in sequence since its original release. The sets were recorded, and the live album just came out; he's restaging the song cycle to celebrate its release.

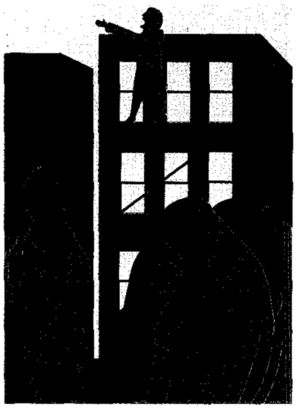
BOWERY BALLROOM
6 Delancey St. (212-533-2111)—Feb. 28: **. . . And You Will Know Us by the Trail of Dead,** a ferocious indie combo from Austin, Texas, first emerged in the mid-nineties with a new brand of progressive rock infused with the anarchic execution and attitude of vintage punk. The band is currently touring to support its ambitious new album, "The Century of Self." March 3: **Dan Auerbach's** day job is playing guitar for the Black Keys, a monster truck of a rock-and-blues duo out of Akron, Ohio. Auerbach is not easily satisfied, and, on his début solo album, "Keep It Hid," he brings the same passion to a wider range of music, touching on everything from bluegrass to soul.

GLASSLANDS GALLERY
289 Kent Ave., between S. 1st and S. 2nd Sts., Brooklyn (No phone)—Feb. 28: **The Dream Bitches'** Summer of Love-inspired rock-and-roll songs are loaded with so many words it's a wonder that the two lead vocalists, Yoko Kikuchi and Ann Zakaluk, don't slip up; they deliver them at a breakneck pace, and slip seamlessly from unison to harmony and back. Kikuchi moves from lead vocals and guitar to the drum kit in **Felt Light Strikes,** Michael Campbell's ethereal indie group, in which falsetto singing exudes the melancholy and hope of spiri-

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
PLAYTIME

Lisa Bielawa's "Chance Encounter," a captivating half-hour piece for singer and ensemble, is made to be heard in a public place, with the musicians arriving at different times and moving about as they perform. Bielawa and the soprano Susan Narucki created the text by transcribing remarks they'd overheard in transient spaces and culling them into a mini-drama of nostalgia ("Where are all the things that I remember?"), conflict ("Do you solve everything by crying?"), existential dread ("Nothing has happened, nothing will happen"), and the eternal search ("We need to know where the party is"). The concept is playful, yet the formal sophistication and lyrical richness of Bielawa's music go deep. A recent performance, with Narucki and the Knights ensemble, took place on two levels of the Whitney Museum. At the end, Narucki sang the phrase "I found a place where we can sit together" while walking through the gift shop toward the exit. She tenderly repeated the word "together," but by then she was the only one making sound.

—*Alex Ross*



DANIELA SCHÜTT POZZO

THE NEW YORKER ONLINE

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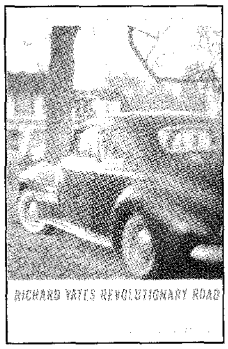
THE BOOK CLUB
newyorker.com/go/bookclub

An online conversation with *The New Yorker* editorial staff, special guests, and readers.



This month, read Richard Yates's "Revolutionary Road."

tuals. With **Buke and Gass,** an acoustic duo who play what they call buke (bass ukulele) and gass (a bass guitar with both guitar and bass strings) with rhythmic complexity and bluesy intensity; the **Art of Shooting,** Kelly Irene Corson's energetic outfit; and **Jack,** a wailing and intense indie band.

HIGHLINE BALLROOM
431 W. 16th St. (212-414-5994)—March 3: The Rock-It Science Festival. A slew of A-list musicians, including the crooner **Rufus Wainwright,** the Patti Smith guitarist **Lenny Kaye,** the heavy-metal monster **Dee Snider** (of Twisted Sister), the Paisley Underground soldier **Steve Wynn** (from the Dream Syndicate), and the guitarist **Gary Lucas** (a veteran of Captain Beefheart's Magic Band), join a number of leading scientists, including **Joseph LeDoux,** a neuroscientist, **Daniel J. Levitin,** a cognitive psychologist and the author of "This Is Your Brain on Music," and the evolutionary geneticist **Pardis Sabeti,** all of whom also like to rock out. This show is sponsored by the Sensation to Emotion Network, an organization devoted to raising awareness about sensory-processing disorders.

(LE) POISSON ROUGE
158 Bleecker St. (212-796-0741)—Feb. 28: The long-running quirk-pop duo **They Might Be Giants** first made their name in the late eighties with endearingly off-kilter songs like "Don't Let's Start" and "Ana Ng" that combined a Dadaist sensibility with smart hooks. In recent years, the Giants have branched out into the giddy realm of children's music (the band's last album, "Here Come the 123's," just earned them a Grammy Award), but this show is for grownups. The opening act, **Oppenheimer,** is an electronic duo from Northern Ireland who mine similarly silly territory.

THE STONE
Avenue C at 2nd St. (No phone)—Feb. 26: **Mountains,** a Brooklyn-based duo, celebrate the release of a spacey and beautiful new record called "Choral" at this appropriately distraction-free venue (there's no bar). The group, a creation of two art-school graduates who've been friends since junior high, mix gentle soundscapes, often derived from field recordings of thunderstorms or the rustling pages of a book, with spare guitar parts and other instrumental touches like accordion or organ. Their emphasis on long, intricate melodies and their attention to textural detail is evocative of Brian Eno's late-seventies ambient period. (For more information, visit www.thestonenyc.com.)

RADIO CITY MUSIC HALL
Sixth Ave. at 50th St. (212-247-4777)—Feb. 27-28: **David Byrne** is on the road performing songs he recorded under the production helm of Brian Eno, including the iconoclastic music of his old band, the Talking Heads, and material from his albums "My Life in the Bush of Ghosts" and "Everything That Happens Will Happen Today." Expect Byrne's hiccupy vocals and skewed lyrics to mesh afresh with Eno's obliquely inventive arrangements.

TOWN HALL
123 W. 43rd St. (212-840-2824)—Feb. 25: The singer-songwriter **Ben Kweller's** catalogue is full of eclectic pop. His new album, "Changing Horses," however, is strictly a country-music affair, and it comes quite naturally to him. He grew up in Texas, after all. With the fine harmonizing of the **Watson Twins,** Chandra and Leigh. Feb. 28: The noted fado singer **Mariza.**

WAMU THEATRE AT MADISON SQUARE GARDEN
Seventh Ave. at 33rd St. (800-745-3000)—Feb. 27-28: **Van Morrison** (see the Beacon Theatre).

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

BIRDLAND
315 W. 44th St. (212-581-3080)—Feb. 25-28: The veteran bassist **Gary Peacock,** an integral member of Keith Jarrett's trio, joins the pianist **Marc Copland** and the drummer **Bill Stewart.**

BLUE NOTE
131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (212-475-8592)—Feb. 24-25: The **McCoy Tyner** trio. The piano icon Tyner welcomes the saxophonist **Gary Bartz,** with whom he's had an occasional partnership since the sixties. Feb. 26-March 1: The **Spanish Harlem Orchestra** is a glorious throwback to the tight-as-a-drum salsa bands of forty years ago.

IRIDIUM
1650 Broadway, at 51st St. (212-582-2121)—Feb. 26-March 1: **Pucho and His Latin Soul Brothers.** Henry (Pucho) Brown and the Latin Soul Brothers turned out eight funky records between 1966 and 1969, and Pucho played Carnegie Hall in 1967, but he spent the next two decades entertaining folks in the Catskills. In the early nineties, he became a cult figure in London when the dance-music scene there picked up his old recordings; he's been touring more or less ever since.

JAZZ STANDARD
116 E. 27th St. (212-576-2232)—This week, three newer members of the Blue Note Records roster are featured during the label's ongoing seventieth-anniversary celebration. Feb. 24-25: The pianist **Aaron Parks.** Feb. 26-27: The guitarist **Lionel Loueke** is joined by **Grégoire Maret,** on harmonica. Feb. 28-March 1: The pianist **Robert Glasper.**

TOWN HALL
123 W. 43rd St. (212-840-2824)—Feb. 26: The trumpeter **Charles Tolliver** and his big band lead the first of two concerts marking the fiftieth anniversary of Thelonious Monk's appearance here. Tolliver will revisit the large-ensemble scores of Hall Overton, the arranger for the original concert. Feb. 27: The pianist **Jason Moran** leads an octet in a multimedia program based on obscure Monk-related photos and recordings.

VILLAGE VANGUARD
178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (212-255-4037)—Feb. 24-March 1: The Venezuelan pianist **Ed Simon,** a veteran of Terence Blanchard's band, brings in his own quartet, featuring the saxophonist **Mark Turner,** the bassist **Ben Street,** and the drummer **Adam Cruz.**

ART
MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (212-535-7710)—**"Cast in Bronze: French Sculpture from Renaissance to Revolution."** Through May 24. ♦ **"Beyond Babylon: Art, Trade, and Diplomacy in the Second Millennium B.C."** Through March 15. ♦ **"Pierre Bonnard: The Late Interiors."** Through April 19. ♦ **"Raphael to Renoir: Drawings from the Collection of Jean Bonna."** Through April 19. ♦ **"Raqib Shaw."** Through March 1. ♦ **"Calder Jewelry."** Through March 1. ♦ **"Walker Evans and the Picture Postcard."** Through May 25. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9400)—**"Martin Kippenberger: The Problem Perspective."** Opens March 1. ♦ **"Projects 89: Klara Liden."** Opens Feb. 25. ♦ **"A Shimmer of Possibility: Photographs by Paul Graham."** Through May 18. ♦ **"Words in Freedom: Futurism at 100."** Through April 6. ♦ **"The Printed Picture."** Through June 1. ♦ **"Performance 1: Tehching Hsieh."** Through May 18. (Open Wednesdays through Mondays, 10:30 to 5:30, and Friday evenings until 8.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-423-3500)—**"The Third Mind: American Artists Contemplate Asia, 1860-1989."** In 1853, the U.S. Navy Commodore Matthew Perry sailed into Uraga Harbor (now Tokyo Bay) and demanded that the country open its borders to free trade. This expansive show considers the flow of influence from East to West. A brush-and-ink painting by Sengai Gibon (1750-1837) depicting the universe as an elemental circle, triangle, and square serves as a springboard for artists like Whistler, Franz Kline, Rauschenberg, Ad Reinhardt, and minimalist composers such as John Cage and La Monte Young (whose work is tinged with Indian ragas). When you approach our era, however, easy distinctions between East and West break down. What does it mean when an American artist like Yoko Ono (b. 1933, Tokyo) or Tehching Hsieh (b. 1950, Taiwan) is recruited to "contemplate Asia"? Through April 19. ♦ **"The Hugo**

Boss Prize 2008: Emily Jacir." Through April 15. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 10 to 5:45, and Fridays, 10 to 7:45.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
Madison Ave. at 75th St. (212-570-3600)—"**Sites.**" Through May 3. ♦ "**Alex Bag.**" Through April 30. ♦ "**Elad Lassry: Three Films.**" Through April 30. (Open Wednesdays, Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 1 to 9.)

BROOKLYN MUSEUM
200 Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—"**Hernan Bas.**" Opens Feb. 27. ♦ "**Unearthing the Truth: Egypt's Pagan and Coptic Sculpture.**" Through May 10. ♦ "**The Black List Project: Timothy Greenfield-Sanders and Elvis Mitchell.**" Through March 29. ♦ "**Burning Down the House: Building a Feminist Art Collection.**" Through April 5. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5, and weekends, 11 to 6.)

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY
Central Park W. at 79th St. (212-769-5100)—"**Climate Change: The Threat to Life and a New Energy Future.**" Through Aug. 16. ♦ "**The Butterfly Conservatory: Tropical Butterflies Alive in Winter.**" Through May 25. (Open daily, 10 to 5:45.)

FRICK COLLECTION
1 E. 70th St. (212-288-0700)—"**Masterpieces of European Painting from the Norton Simon Museum.**" Through May 10. (Open Tuesdays through Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 11 to 5.)

INTERNATIONAL CENTER OF PHOTOGRAPHY
1133 Sixth Ave., at 43rd St. (212-857-0000)—"**Weird Beauty: Fashion Photography Now.**" Through May 3. ♦ "**This Is Not a Fashion Photograph.**" Through May 3. ♦ "**Edward Steichen: In High Fashion.**" Through May 3. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, and Saturdays and Sundays, 10 to 6, and Fridays, 10 to 8.)

MORGAN LIBRARY & MUSEUM
225 Madison Ave., at 36th St. (212-685-0008)—"**On the Money: Cartoons for *The New Yorker*.**" Through May 24. ♦ "**The Thaw Collection of Master Drawings: Acquisitions Since 2002.**" Through May 3. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10:30 to 5, Fridays, 10:30 to 9, Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

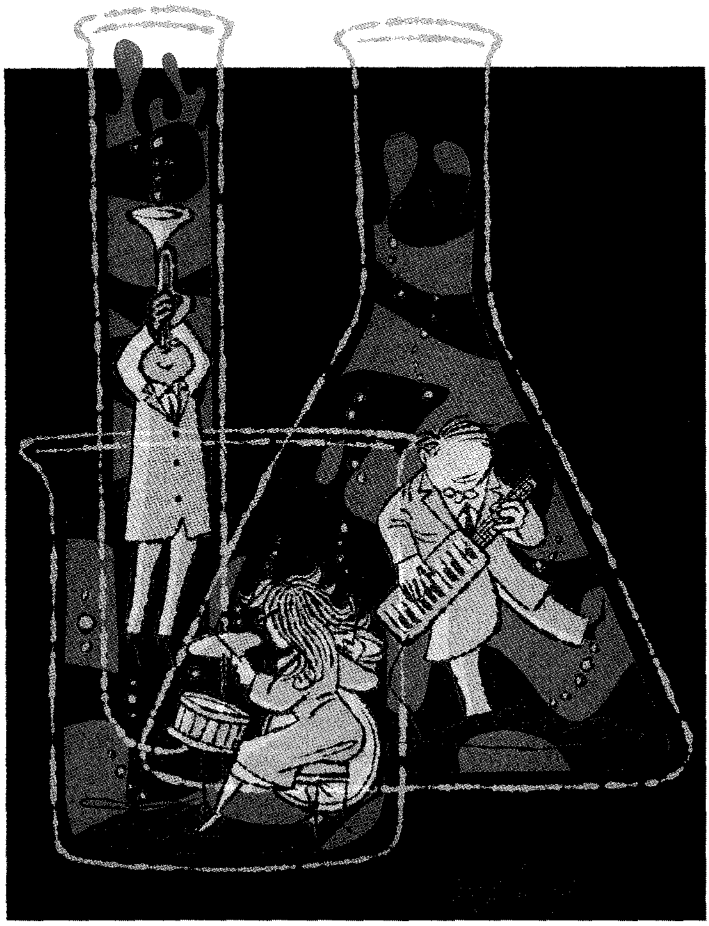
MUSEUM OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK
Fifth Ave. at 103rd St. (212-534-1672)—"**Valentina.**" Through May 17. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 10 to 5.)

NEW MUSEUM
235 Bowery, at Prince St. (212-219-1222)—"**Jeremy Deller: It Is What It Is: Conversations About Iraq.**" Through March 22. ♦ "**Daria Martin: Minotaur.**" Through March 8. ♦ "**Mathias Poledna: Crystal Palace.**" Through March 8. (Open Wednesdays and weekends, noon to 6, and Thursdays and Fridays, noon to 10.)

NEW-YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY
170 Central Park W., at 77th St. (212-873-3400)—"**Abraham Lincoln in His Own Words: An Intimate View of Our Greatest President.**" Through July 12. ♦ "**Audubon's Aviary.**" Through April 5. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 10 to 6, and Friday evenings until 8.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

MATTA
In contemporary-art circles, the Chilean-born painter Matta (1911-2002) may be best known as the father of the radical sculptor Gordon Matta-Clark (1943-1978), but his Surrealist paintings influenced the likes of Arshile Gorky and Adolph Gottlieb, and Duchamp credited his work with "the discovery of regions of space until then unknown to art." This concentrated survey, the first major show of the artist's work since a 1957 MOMA retrospective, includes canvases from the forties through the eighties. Early paintings—with angst-ridden titles like "Interrogation Humaine" and "Vivre le Mort"—of abstract forms anchored in murky backgrounds reveal affinities with Yves Tanguy and Miró. His palette lightened over the years and, by the eighties, he was painting with a cartoony abandon that rivalled Keith Haring and Kenny Scharf. Through Feb. 28. (Pace Wildenstein, 32 E. 57th St. 212-421-3292.)



The Rock-It Science Festival, at the Highline Ballroom.

EDWIN FOTHERINGHAM

ALEC SOTH
Like so many contemporary photographers following in the tradition of Robert Frank, Soth works on open-ended projects—a random mix of landscapes, interiors, group shots, and portraits loosely anchored by a theme. It's tempting to read "The Last Days of W.," which sprawls through seven galleries here, as an opinionated commentary on the state of America in the Bush years, but it's not that simple. The mood shifts from self-satisfaction to disappointment to blank numbness and back. Because Soth's handsome color photographs are notations made in passing, you can't expect them to add up to a single political statement—but you're welcome to try. Through March 7. (Gagosian, 980 Madison Ave, at 76th St. 212-744-2313.)

"SACRED SIGHT: PHOTOGRAPHS IN INDIA"
India has provided visiting photographers with a fascinating if elusive subject: exotic and tantalizingly unknowable. A serious survey exhibition on India as seen through the camera's lens (one that includes more than token Indian artists) remains to be done, but this show, drawn largely from the gallery's rich archives, is a useful jumping-off point. Among the sharpest foreign observers here are Henri Cartier-Bresson, William Gedney, Marc Riboud, and Margaret Bourke-White. Four of Mary Ellen Mark's color images of brothel life along Bombay's Falkland Road are a high point, as are the vividly hand-colored vintage studio portraits that open the show and hint at where it might have gone. Through March 14. (Greenberg, 41 E. 57th St. 212-334-0010.)

Short List

PETER DOIG: Werner, 4 E. 77th St. 212-988-1623. Through March 14. **FRANCESCA DIMATTIO:** Salon 94, at 12 E. 94th St. 646-672-9212. Through March 13. **ELLIOTT ERWITT:** Houk, 745 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 212-750-7070. Through March. 7. **DAN GRAHAM:** Marian Goodman, 24 W. 57th St. 212-581-5187. Opens March 3. **JASPER JOHNS:** Greenberg Van Doren, 730 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 212-445-0444. Through March 14. **CHRIS MARTIN:** Mitchell-Innes & Nash, 1018 Madison Ave., at 78th St. 212-744-7400. Through March 27.

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

THOMAS HIRSCHHORN
He of the packing tape and philosophical labyrinths returns, in hamhandedly satirical form, with a vast, mocked-up gym featuring scads of fitness equipment, monitors, and nudgy elements, such as world globes and maps, that signify the ubiquity—and the political irresponsibility—of exercise fetishism today. Mannequins with holes in their chests (heartless, get it?) model the narcissistic body beautiful. The jokes register so quickly, and are so shallow, that any attention paid to the installation's physical and discursive details feels postmortem. The once reliably mordant Hirschhorn has gone toothlessly self-righteous: a young curmudgeon. Through April 11. (Gladstone, 530 W. 21st St. 212-206-9300.)

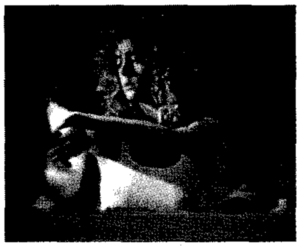
MIKA ROTTENBERG
These large color photographs, commissioned by *W* magazine, are titled "Performance Stills," and they could easily pass for documentation of Rottenberg's loony, elaborately staged videos. As in those videos, a series of cramped compartments were built to house objects and people involved in cryptic manufacturing activities. A cutaway view of the cubicles lets one peer into what looks like a big, brightly painted doll's house at a live-action cartoon as bulky bodies extend through the ceiling and legs and arms jut out of holes in the wall. Domestic touches cheer up what might otherwise look like a Surrealist's sweatshop—an artist's assistant's nightmare of forced labor. Through March 7. (Klagsbrun, 526 W. 26th St. 212-243-3335.)

JOSH SMITH
The former assistant of Christopher Wool flogs messy, spontaneous-looking painting that is visually hot and conceptually gelid. Thirty-eight pictures in two standard sizes—five by four feet and four by three—parade varieties of broad-brushed, Expressionistic smear and splotch in smolderingly earthen or acridly just-dirty colors. Some incorporate collaged photocopies of paintings and newsprint. Even the hands-on works seem like mocking reproductions of themselves. Smith dispenses fastidiously empty pleasure. His style is to the intrinsic Eros of painting what hooking up is to "Tristan und Isolde." Through March 14. (Luhring Augustine, 531 W. 24th St. 212-206-9100.)

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK ON THE WATERFRONT

In Louis Malle's "Atlantic City" (1981), the tawdry beach-resort town, once a paradise for racketeers, is losing its old hotels to the wrecking ball and its old criminal ways to the modern casino. In this atmosphere of dubious nostalgia and uncertain rebirth, an elderly numbers runner (Burt Lancaster), eager to assert his honor, looks after a gangster's widow (Kate Reid) and tries to help a couple of young people (Robert Joy and Susan Sarandon) make their way. Written by John Guare, the movie has a lyrical and colloquial gracefulness. As Malle gathers the elements of the story, about a stolen drug shipment, he gives the characters time to explore their dreams and feelings. The tone is ruminative, eccentric, and affectionate, yet the humor also carries a strong undercurrent of self-seeking. Lancaster plays a small-timer, but he carries himself with such magnificence that he appears to be a prince, and when he looks at Sarandon's nakedness, his unnerving, cold-eyed stare lights up with the fire of a young lover. In all, "Atlantic City," screening at MOMA Feb. 25-27, is the best of Malle's American films—the warmest and funniest, and completely at ease in a unique American milieu.

—*David Denby*



PARAMOUNT/COURTESY EVERETT COLLECTION

ANDREA ZITTEL
Crocheted-wool designs, mounted on boards, and black-on-white drawings (almost all of which suggest blueprints of domestic interiors) line gray-painted walls, which are studded with bronze hooks that hold antique sewing scissors, used teabags, yarn, and other homey items. The serial installation evokes the unfolding of time, continuity, and ritual, and its implication seems to be that creativity can abide within even the most restrictive parameters. (Zittel's credo for years has been "liberation through limitation.") But the only piece that really breaks free of its confines is a videotape of four young performers re-creating a knitting pattern with their footsteps, to the hypnotic beat of clapping hands. Through March 7. (Rosen, 525 W. 25th St. 212-627-6000.)

"TO BE DETERMINED"
This show of recent work by artists who make or appropriate photographs is whip-smart but a little too hip for its own good. Although there are several gorgeous abstractions by Walead Beshty, Liz Deschenes, and Eileen Quinlan, and clever, Pop-inflected photographs about photographs by Anne Collier and Torbjorn Rodland, other pictures have a conceptual bent that brings a chill to the room. Chilliest: Josephine Pryde, who wraps glossy color prints around long, narrow aluminum tubes, rendering the images all but unreadable. Although the work projects aggressively out from the wall, it closes in on itself and, finally, just shuts down. Through March 7. (Kreps, 525 W. 22nd St. 212-741-8849.)

Short List

RICHARD ALDRICH: Bortolami, 510 W. 25th St. 212-727-2050. Through Feb. 28. **LOTHAR HEMPEL / EBERHARD HAVEKOST:** Kern, 532 W. 20th St. 212-367-9663. Through March 21. **ELLSWORTH KELLY:** Marks, 522 W. 22nd St. and 523 W. 24th St. 212-243-0200. Through April 11. **RUDOLF STINGEL:** Cooper, 534 W. 21st St. 212-255-1105. Through March 21. **JULIANNE SWARTZ:** Bienvenu, 529 W. 20th St. 212-206-7990. Through March 28. **LISA YUSKAVAGE:** Zwirner, 533 W. 19th St. 212-727-2070. Through March 28.

DANCE

NEW YORK CITY BALLET
Highlights of this closing week include Balanchine's one-act "Swan Lake" and Christopher Wheeldon's playful "Mercurial Manoeuvres," from 2000, set to Shostakovich's "Piano Concerto No. 1 in C Minor." Sunday's performance offers an all-American matinée, with Robbins's "Glass Pieces," a John Adams piece by Peter Martins ("Hallelujah Junction"), Balanchine's exuberant pas de deux "Tarantella," and his even more exuberant bit of patriotic pastiche, "Stars and Stripes." ♦ Feb. 25 at 7:30 and Feb. 27 at 8: "Swan Lake," "The Steadfast Tin Soldier," "Romeo and Juliet," and "Slaughter on Tenth Avenue." ♦ Feb. 26 at 8 and Feb. 28 at 2 and 8: "Slice to Sharp," "Hallelujah Junction," "A Simple Symphony," and "Mercurial Manoeuvres." ♦ March 1 at 3: "Glass Pieces," "Hallelujah Junction," "Tarantella," and "Stars and Stripes." (David H. Koch, Lincoln Center. 212-721-6500.)

DOUG VARONE AND DANCERS
Like its score, Steve Reich's "Daniel Variations," Varone's new "Alchemy" draws upon both the Book of Daniel and the assassination of Daniel Pearl. Accordingly, the nearly relentless swirl of imagery suggests captivity, men reduced to beasts, writing on the wall. The final picture seems intended as a dawn of hope, but, like a prophetic dream, it can also be interpreted more darkly. "Lux," a bright maelstrom from 2006 set to Philip Glass, balances the program. (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. Feb. 24-25 at 7:30, Feb. 26-27 at 8, Feb. 28 at 2 and 8, and March 1 at 2 and 7:30.)

PAUL TAYLOR DANCE COMPANY
Taylor, approaching eighty, returns to City Center for a packed three-week season. "Beloved Renegade," a New York première, is inspired by Walt Whitman and set to Poulenc's "Gloria"; it takes place in a dark realm in which bonds of affection reveal suffering and, ultimately, death. One program pairs one of Taylor's most comical works, "Funny Papers," with two Mexican-themed pieces from 2007, "De Sueños" and "De Sueños Que Se Repiten." The second of the season's premières, "Changes," a microcosm of the sixties set to the songs of the Mamas and the Papas, will be unveiled on Tuesday. For a full schedule, visit www.nycitycenter.org. (131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212. Feb. 25 and March 3 at 7, Feb. 26 at 2, Feb. 27-28 at 8, and March 1 at 3. Through March 15.)

DEAN MOSS AND YOON JIN KIM
Happening upon a book of turn-of-the-twentieth-century poetry by *kisaeng*, the Korean equivalent of geishas, Dean Moss was struck by its parallels to his own experience of transcending caste through culture. With the Korean choreographer Yoon Jin Kim, he has fashioned "Kisaeng Becomes You," an impressionistic theatrical experience. Five Korean actresses serve as guides, making fish faces and engaging in microphone fellatio to the music of Janis Joplin, but it is audience volunteers who put on wigs, recite poetry, and trouble the notion of sincerity in performance. (Dance Theatre Workshop, 219 W. 19th St. 212-924-0077. Feb. 25-28 at 7:30.)

DOUGLAS DUNN & DANCERS
In 1980, when the Paris Opera Ballet invited Douglas Dunn to choreograph Stravinsky's commedia-dell'arte ballet "Pulcinella," it started a still transgressive crossover trend. Revived for the 92nd Street Y Harkness Dance Festival, the piece, not seen in New York for twenty-five years, seems a little quaint in its cheeky flouting of Parisian conventions. The elegance of Dunn's intelligence dates less, and is more strongly on display in the intertwined duets of his new "Then Boss in Man?," nowhere more so than in the choreographer's own ambiguous presence. (Ailey Citigroup, 405 W. 55th St. 212-415-5500. Feb. 25-26 and Feb. 28 at 8 and March 1 at 2.)

LAVA
Sarah East Johnson's troupe of impressive I-am-woman acrobats visits the Brooklyn Lyceum with their latest creation, "We Become." (227 Fourth Ave. For tickets, visit www.brownpapertickets.com. Feb. 26-27 at 8 and Feb. 28-March 1 at 7.)

THE NETA DANCE COMPANY
The fragile art of origami provides the inspiration for Neta Pulvermacher's "Fold." Boats and swans and other objects made of paper whip through the air, tied to the dancers with strings. Amid all that paper, the cast alternates between following the active verbs of origami instructions and conveying the desperate awkwardness of human relations, foot on forehead, fingers in mouth. While detritus accumulates, so does absurdity: Bulgarian disco, songs shouted in harmony, mummified dancers. The sound of paper is as much part of the score as is the live accordion playing of Alon Nechushtan. (St. Mark's In-the-Bowery, Second Ave. at 10th St. 866-811-4111. Feb. 26-28 at 8:30.)

SAVION GLOVER
After last year's embarrassingly ill-conceived dalliance with amateur ballet and modern dance, the leading luminary of tap returns to the Joyce with something of a return to first principles. For Glover, the most fundamental principle of all is that tap dance is music. With "Solo in Time," he and the tap band Bare Soundz take a side trip into flamenco, a music with its own percussive dance. Don't expect any but the most casual references to that dance form, or any evidence that Glover has studied its traditions. He relies on his ear, which usually merits such trust. (175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. March 3 at 7:30. Through March 22.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC OPERA

METROPOLITAN OPERA
Historically, the Met has dusted off Cilea's "**Adriana Lecouvreur**"—the most elegant of the old verismo chestnuts—for its most popular divas, but this time around the show's raison d'être is the tenor Plácido Domingo, who is celebrating the fortieth anniversary of his Met début. A protean singer by any standard, Domingo still has the sizzle and swagger to portray Maurizio, the aristocratic playboy. Also with the es-

timable Maria Guleghina and Olga Borodina; Marco Armiliato conducts. (Feb. 25 and Feb. 28 at 8. These are the final performances.) ♦ Puccini's delightful light opera **"La Rondine,"** animated by the considerable talents of Angela Gheorghiu (singing "Chi il bel sogno di Doretta"), Giuseppe Filianoti, Lisette Oropesa, Marius Brenciu, and Samuel Ramey; Armiliato leads the final performance. (Feb. 26 at 8.) ♦ With its bold design and cinematic sweep, Anthony Minghella's production of **"Madama Butterfly"** inaugurated Peter Gelb's regime at the Met, and it remains compelling in revival. It returns with its original leading singers, Cristina Gallardo-Domâs, Maria Zifchak, Marcello Giordani, and Dwayne Croft; Patrick Summers conducts. (Feb. 27 and March 3 at 8.) ♦ A star-making performance from Sondra Radvanovsky, in the role of Leonora, is but one highlight of David McVicar's new production of **"Il Trovatore,"** which, thankfully, banishes the ghost of the company's disastrous 2000 staging. Also with charismatic and capable singing from Dolora Zajick, Marcelo Álvarez, and Dmitri Hvorostovsky; voices and instruments fuse powerfully under the baton of Gianandrea Noseda. (Feb. 28 at 1.) ♦ Even for a bel-canto opera, Bellini's **"La Sonnambula,"** a melodrama about a sleepwalking girl in a Swiss village, strains the suspension of disbelief. It needs great artists: written for Pasta and Rubini, the finest Italian singers of the day, it flourished famously via the voices of Maria Callas and Cesare Valletti, in the legendary 1955 production (by Luchino Visconti) at La Scala. Mary Zimmerman, the daring director who turned "Lucia di Lammermoor" on its head last season, is now in command, working with two more singers bound for greatness, Natalie Dessay and Juan Diego Flórez; Evelino Pidò. (March 2 at 8.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000.)

GOTHAM CHAMBER OPERA: "L'ISOLA DISABITATA"

For Neal Goren's excellent little group, the two-hundredth anniversary of Haydn's death coincides with the seasonal absence of one of New York's two major companies, and Goren has hired none other than Mark Morris to fill the vacuum, giving him directorial carte blanche over "Desert Island," a comedy from 1779. Takesha Meshé Kizart, Valerie Ogbonnaya, Vale Rideout, and Tom Corbeil take the opera's four roles. Allen Moyer designed the sets; Goren conducts. (John Jay College, Tenth Ave. at 58th St. 212-279-4200. Feb. 25 and Feb. 27-28 at 8.)

ALICE TULLY HALL: "VITA NUOVA"

Opera comes to the newly renovated hall in a grand way, with the dynamic Vladimir Jurowski conducting the London Philharmonic Orchestra in the U.S. première of a new opera, inspired by Dante, by the composer Vladimir Martynov; Mark Padmore and Joan Rodgers are featured in the cast. (212-721-6500. Feb. 28 at 7:30.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

VIENNA PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA

The burnished sounds of the incomparable ensemble, always welcome at Carnegie Hall, expand in a four-concert series conducted by Zubin Mehta. Feb. 25 at 8: Lang Lang is the orchestra's guest in a program that includes not only Chopin's Piano Concerto No. 2 in F Minor but also Wagner's "Rienzi" Overture and a batch of music by Johann Strauss II (including the "Emperor" Waltz and the "Fledermaus" Overture). ♦ Feb. 27 at 8: An all-orchestra concert offers two titanic masterworks: Schoenberg's "Transfigured Night" and Bruckner's Symphony No. 9 in D Minor. ♦ Feb. 28 at 8: Lyricism is the touchstone for the next concert—Angela Maria Blasi sings orchestrated songs by Joseph Marx, an offering bookended by instrumental works by two major song composers, Wolf's "Italian Serenade" and Schubert's Symphony No. 9 (the "Great"). ♦ March 1 at 2: Mehta brings down the curtain by conducting Mozart's "Marriage of Figaro" Overture, Haydn's Symphony No. 104 ("London"), and Strauss's "Ein Heldenleben." (212-247-7800.)

ALICE TULLY HALL REOPENING

Lincoln Center celebrates the renovation of the hall with a cavalcade of extraordinary performances that highlight the flexibility and appeal of the space. (See also Recitals.) Feb. 26 at 8: David Robertson conducts the Juilliard Orchestra in a free concert containing one item—Messiaen's explosively radiant "From the Canyons to the Stars," performed in the hall for which it was written (on commission from Miss Tully). (Tickets, which are required, are available at the Juilliard Box Office.) ♦ March 1 at 5: Period performance comes online at the hall with a rendition of Bach's Mass in B Minor by the Collegium Vocale Gent Choir and Orchestra and its conductor Philippe Herreweghe, renowned for his delicately Impressionistic interpretations. ♦ March 2 at 7:30: The last time Paavo Järvi brought the Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie Bremen to Lincoln Center to play Beethoven, listeners were impressed by readings of exceptional power and concentration. They return to perform the Symphonies Nos. 3 ("Eroica") and 8, along with (appropriately) the "Consecration of the House" Overture. ♦ March 2 at 10:30: Järvi and his musicians finish the evening with an intermissionless performance of Beethoven's First and Seventh Symphonies. (212-721-6500.)

CECILIA BARTOLI AND ORCHESTRA LA SCINTILLA

From her base at the Zürich Opera, the dazzling mezzo-soprano launches rescue missions into obscure corners of the repertory. Her latest is devoted to music connected with the legendary diva Maria Malibran, including vocal and instrumental works by Mendelssohn ("Infelice," and the Scherzo from the Octet), Rossini (featuring "Nacqui all'affanno . . . non più mesta" from "La Cenerentola"), Donizetti, Balfe, and Bériot, among others. (212-247-7800. March 3 at 8.)

RECITALS

ALICE TULLY HALL RECITALS

The newly renovated hall resounds with a broad selection of vibrant chamber music. Feb. 25 at 8: Two delectable British artists, the tenor Mark Padmore and the pianist Imogen Cooper, offer two works by Schubert, the Piano Sonata in A Major, D. 959, and "Die Schöne Müllerin." ♦ March 3 at 5:30: Ethel, the versatile and virtuosic downtown string quartet, christens the hall's glass-enclosed Grand Foyer with a performance of Phil Kline's "Space," a site-specific sound installation. ♦ March 3 at 7: New music makes its powerful mark during the festivities with a marathon concert by three extraordinary groups—Alarm Will Sound, the Bang on a Can All-Stars, and Steve Reich & Musicians—performing works by such composers as Derek Bermel, Caleb Burhans, Michael Gordon, Julia Wolfe, and Reich (the iconic "Music for 18 Musicians"). (212-721-6500.)

HUGO WOLF QUARTET

The Austrian Cultural Forum often hosts free concerts in its intimate blond-wood concert hall. Music for string quartet by Haydn, Berg (the "Lyric Suite"), and the Canadian jazz master Kenny Wheeler is on the schedule this week, all performed by the stylish young ensemble. (11 E. 52nd St. 212-319-5300. Feb. 26 at 7:30.)

CHAMBER MUSIC SOCIETY OF LINCOLN CENTER: "WAR AND PIECES"

Daniel Hope, an exciting presence in the violin world because of his distinctive virtuosity as well as his innovative programming, is in charge of another Alice Tully Hall concert, combining Stravinsky's "Histoire du Soldat" with Beethoven's "Egmont" Overture (arranged for the same cabaret ensemble as the Stravinsky). The actor Klaus Maria Brandauer lends his smoldering presence to the evening by narrating "Histoire," backed up by a band that includes Hope, the bassist Annika Pigorsch, the clarinettist Jose Franch-Ballester, the bassoonist Peter Kolkay, and the trumpeter Kevin Cobb. (212-875-5788. Feb. 27 at 7:30.)

DANIELLE DE NIESE

The compelling young Australian soprano, already a force in the operatic world, joins an experienced colleague, the pianist Ken Noda, in arias and songs by Handel, Grieg, Wolf (selections from the Mörike and Italian Songbooks), Barber, Poulenc, and Bizet. (Weill Recital Hall, Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. Feb. 27 at 7:30.)

SILJA GÖTZ

ON AND OFF THE AVENUE
MATTHEW WILLIAMSON

45 W. 14th St. (212-255-9881)—What recession? At the opening-night party for the British designer Matthew Williamson's three-thousand-square-foot boutique full of optimistically hued frocks, throngs dressed in New York black waited their turns to squeeze inside—except, that is, for Mischa Barton, Heidi Klum, Lindsay Lohan, and a few other notables, who were ushered right in. And so hundreds of partygoers, champagne flutes in hand, fraternized in oddly shaped alcoves decorated with rococo furniture sprayed gold, chandeliers of Venini glass, birdless birdcages, and a Buddha wearing long strands of love beads. A fibre-optics wall resembling an aquarium minus fish cast a psychedelic glow in a room dedicated to shoes and handbags. But that was ho-hum compared to the glass-encased forest of trees, flowers, and cacti that greeted anyone who could manage to shove his or her way to the back of the shop. "Very Museum of Natural History," said one of many tall, skinny women. "But what's a mannequin like that doing in a tropical habitat?" Floating from neon-hued glass rods were sheer-crêpe caftans in pastels and creams with intricate embroidery and beading ($1,275), a pair of cigarette pants in fuschia Shantung silk ($775), a lavender bikini trimmed in orange with a gold charm dangling from its top ($325), an acid-yellow-green belted lamé coat ($2,800), and tunics ($4,000) and gowns ($6,000) so dense with sequins they might be bulletproof. The collection is strong in pastel prints and vivid solids. This is the wardrobe a trust-fund hippie would take to a high-end beach ashram in Goa. On my way out, I looked at a lovely lime-green chiffon shift adorned with lustrous gewgaws, with a yoke of silk cording along the shoulders ($2,475), and breezed past a pair of black taffeta hot pants ($550), about which I heard someone who looked about twenty-one say, "Oh, to be twenty and be able to wear these."

—*Patricia Marx*

"O CAPTAIN, MY CAPTAIN"
The Civil War and the assassination of President Lincoln are two subjects that have been deeply mined by American poets and composers. In a free concert at Lincoln Center's Bruno Walter Auditorium, the New York Public Library presents a program featuring songs by such composers as Kurt Weill, Daron Hagen, Jake Heggie, and Ned Rorem (his masterpiece "War Scenes"), sung by Meagan Miller, James Rodgers, and Tyler Duncan. (Feb. 28 at 3. Admission, which is free, begins thirty minutes before the performance.)

HÉLÈNE GRIMAUD
The French pianist, at her best in German repertory, comes to the 92nd Street Y to offer a recital of music by Bach (including two preludes and fugues from "The Well-Tempered Clavier," along with Bach arrangements by Busoni, Rachmaninoff, and Liszt) and Beethoven (the Sonata No. 30 in E Major, Op. 109). (Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-415-5500. Feb. 28 at 8.)

VERDEHR TRIO
The venerable ensemble, which over the past three decades has engendered a sizable repertory for its unique combination of violin, clarinet, and piano, returns to the Kosciuszko Foundation to perform contemporary works by Augusta Read Thomas and Lee Hoiby, along with music by Mozart and Fanny Mendelssohn. (15 E. 65th St. 212-734-2130. March 1 at 3.)

"Michael and Dominique, Detroit (Wedding), 2008," by Alec Soth, at Gagosian.

DONALD BERMAN: "WHEN BRAHMA SLEEPS"
Berman, an invaluable pianist on the new-music scene, comes to the music club (Le) Poisson Rouge (where a cash bar awaits your patronage) to offer performances of electro-acoustic works by such composers as Mark Wingate, Su Lian Tan, and David Rakowski. (158 Bleecker St. www.lprnyc.com. March 1 at 7.)

MOVIES OPENING

AN AMERICAN AFFAIR
William Olsson directed this drama, set in the early nineteen-sixties, about a teen-age boy's relationship with his next-door neighbor. Starring Cameron Bright, Gretchen Mol, and Noah Wyle. Opening Feb. 27. (Sunshine Cinema.)

EXAMINED LIFE
A documentary about philosophy, directed by Astra Taylor, featuring interviews with Cornel West, Peter Singer, and other contemporary philosophers. Opening Feb. 25. (IFC Center.)

ROBERT BLECKER WANTS ME DEAD
A documentary, directed by Ted Schillinger, about the unlikely friendship of a death-row inmate and a law professor who favors capital punishment. Opening Feb. 27. (Cinema Village.)

STREET FIGHTER: THE LEGEND OF CHUN-LI
Andrzej Bartkowiak directed this thriller, based on a video game, about a young woman who goes to Hong Kong to avenge her father's kidnapping. Starring Moon Bloodgood. Opening Feb. 20. (In wide release.)

THE TROUBLE WITH ROMANCE
This drama, directed by Gene Rhee, features four stories about couples falling in and out of love. Opening Feb. 27. (Quad Cinema.)

NOW PLAYING

BIRDSONG
Long, static takes have become a sort of badge of honor in the international art cinema, and the Spanish director Albert Serra's third feature is festooned with them. They serve as visual trance music while telling, with a surprising, de-dramatized simplicity, a tale of vast mythopoetic scope—the journey of the Three Magi and their adoration of the infant Christ. Filming in the Canary Islands and Iceland, Serra shows the trio trudging through hypnotically beautiful, vacant locations; a breathtaking eight-minute take of their unsure wandering toward and over a desert rise suggests the mad grandeur of their devotion. What's missing is mental activity. It's hard to believe that the Wise Men weren't a little chattier, though when they do talk, the results are droll and visionary, as when they speculate on what clouds are made of and consider climbing a mountain to reach them. The movie, for all of its astonishing photography, seems calculated to elicit admiration along with wonder, and Serra's scenes of Joseph, Mary, and the baby Jesus, around which the movie revolves, offer little historical audacity or insight. In Catalan and Hebrew.—*Richard Brody* (Anthology Film Archives.)

THE CLASS
Extraordinary. François Bégaudeau, a teacher in a Paris public school in the Twentieth Arrondissement, published a novel in 2006 chronicling a year in his classroom. Along with the director Laurent Cantet and the writer Robin Campillo, he then condensed and reshaped the material into a two-hour drama centering on the teacher (Bégaudeau, playing himself) and a small number of students (all played by actual students, though not the same ones he wrote about). Bégaudeau, who is in his thirties, is handsome, lean, and quick, with a strong voice; his slouching or rowdy fourteen-year-olds are mostly of African or Caribbean descent—still outsiders in France, and rightfully touchy about it. Some of them are resistant to education, which disrupts the pleasures of adolescence, and Bégaudeau aggressively comes after them, challenging, correcting, teasing, criticizing. The students are alive to him and come back hard, questioning French notions of discipline and manners. In all, "The Class" is a prime document of French post-colonial blues, though its relevance to American urban education could not be any greater if it had been shot in the Bronx or Trenton or South Los Angeles. In French.—*David Denby* (Reviewed in our issue of 12/22 & 29/08.) (In limited release.)

CONFESSIONS OF A SHOPAHOLIC
The promising premise, from Sophie Kinsella's novels, of a young, clothing-obsessed journalist who schemes to get a job at a fashion magazine while fending off debt collectors, is sunk beyond salvage by the principals' leaden attempts at whimsy. The director, P. J. Hogan, doesn't find the balance between comic realism and slapstick antics; the real auteur, the costume designer Patricia Field, styles the movie beyond fashion, to the point of absurdity; and Isla Fisher, as Rebecca, the journalist, is a sinkhole of energy and never conveys the spontaneity and cleverness that are the character's hallmark. (The far livelier Krysten Ritter, as Rebecca's roommate, steals all the scenes they share.) The most interesting part of the story—the connection between pop culture and the addictions it so avidly monetizes—is buried beneath a truckload of taffeta.—*R.B.* (In wide release.)

CORALINE
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (In wide release.)

THE CURIOUS CASE OF BENJAMIN BUTTON
A child is born in New Orleans in 1918 with the features and internal organs of an old man; then, as time passes, his age declines until he goes through late middle age, middle age, youth, and so on, back toward infancy and death. This science-fiction reverse-aging conceit, from an early F. Scott Fitzgerald story, has been rendered by the writer Eric Roth and the director David Fincher with a fanatical literalness that occasionally touches the uncanny but that often feels laborious and even pedantic. As Benjamin becomes younger, he turns into the handsome, fortyish Brad Pitt, and he has an affair with a vibrant, normally aging dancer (Cate Blanchett). They meet in the middle, so to speak, but the relationship is odd, since, instead of the fervent memories of youth, Benjamin has only the relief that he is no longer a crotchety old man. He's bland; he's Brad Pitt. There is much else, about New Orleans, the sea, and many other things, but the movie is an attenuated folly.—*D.D.* (2/9 & 16/09) (In wide release.)

FRIDAY THE 13TH
A reboot of the popular horror series (the 1980 original was a rip-off of the infinitely superior "Halloween") about the murderous madman Jason Voorhees, whose mother was killed by a camper at Camp Crystal Lake. In this version, he takes his revenge on a group of nubile, pot-smoking campers in the usual grotesque ways (bow and arrow, hatchet, machete), and the screaming never stops. The most popular slasher films of the seventies and eighties earned their scares through low-budget scuzziness, tight screenplays, and suspense. The recent rash of remakes (such as "The Texas Chainsaw Massacre" and "The Hills Have Eyes") have traded that uniqueness for wide-screen lensing, mediocre dialogue, and unimaginative violence. This slasher film is about as exciting as a visit to the butcher. The fresh-faced unfortunates include Jared Padalecki and Danielle Panabaker; the routine direction is by Marcus Nispel.—*Bruce Diones* (In wide release.)

FROST/NIXON
In its transfer from stage to film, Peter Morgan's account of David Frost's lengthy set of interviews with Richard Nixon in 1977, three years after he resigned the Presidency, has taken on an aura of momentousness unwarranted by the event itself. Frank Langella's performance provides considerable insights into Nixon's intelligence, caginess, and fraudulent sentimentality, and Michael Sheen makes Frost into a toothy, bright, shallow but smart showman-journalist. The interviews themselves, always absorbing, build to Nixon's climactic admission that he let the country down during the Watergate crisis. The media whirl of negotiation, advisers, preparation, and so on is engaging enough, but the episode itself changed nothing. It was a journalistic coup, not a historical milestone, and the filmmakers don't seem to realize that. Directed by Ron Howard.—*D.D.* (12/8/08) (In wide release.)

GOMORRAH
A hell of a film, if you can take the hell. Matteo Garrone's movie is adapted from a 2006 book, an inflamed investigation of organized crime in Naples, by the journalist Roberto Saviano. The screen version is no less shocking, but Garrone, unlike Saviano, keeps his cool—as he needs to, with five separate narratives to juggle. We get a pair of teen-agers who dream of becoming sadistic big shots, although the camera catches something instantly pathetic in their delirium. (Watch them standing on a lonely beach in their underpants, firing stolen guns at nothing at all.) We get a kid who carries drugs for the Camorra, the Neapolitan Mafia, the innocence seeping from him with every favor. Then, there are three men who look as if they could be related (it must be deliberate casting). One is a tailor who moonlights as a teacher for Chinese immigrant workers; another hands out money in the Mob-ruled warrens of a northern suburb; a third dumps toxic waste into the sump of the countryside. These are finely gauged performances (Salvatore Cantalupo's heartbreaking one, as the tailor, being the standout), but Garrone went one better by recruiting locals into the minor roles, and the whole project has a dangerously authentic smell. Yet the movie stirs beyond documentary, ending up as a controlled rumination on the cruelty of fate; most of the characters are as flies to wanton boys, and they don't come more wanton than the Camorra. In Italian (or, rather, Neapolitan).—*Anthony Lane* (2/23/09) (In limited release.)

IN GIRUM IMUS NOCTE ET CONSUMIMUR IGNI
Middle-class people are slaves, movies are lies, freedom is illusory, everything is worse than before: so says Guy Debord in the lecture that makes up most of the soundtrack of this 1978 film essay—and that's just the beginning. Despising images, which he assimilates to the corrupt "society of the spectacle" that he inveighs against, he fills the screen mainly with what he considers junk—old trailers and film clips, home movies, press clippings, and sometimes even nothing—as an expression of contempt for all movies (except his own) and for all viewers (except those who agree with him). Yet as his rant takes an autobiographical turn it rises to a sublime rhetorical pitch. Celebrating his youthful philosophical revelry in the cafés of postwar Saint-Germain-des-Prés, a Parisian paradise he now considers despoiled, he gives his own insurrectionary cabal, the so-called Situationists, full and sole credit for May '68, for which, he claims—not least in the Latin palindrome of the title, which means "At night we walk in circles and are consumed by fire"—they paid the price. Debord's preening, nihilistic, perpetually adolescent narcissism is seductive yet utterly empty; his self-righteous celebration of this emptiness, collapsing upon itself with negative energy, is a cinematic black hole. In French.—*R.B.* (Film Society of Lincoln Center; March 1.)

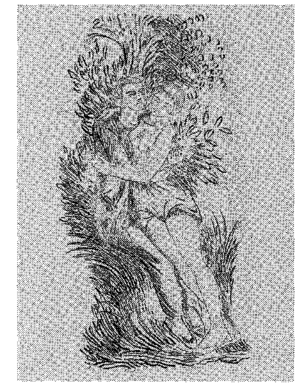
THE INTERNATIONAL
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (In wide release.)

JUST ANYBODY
This new melodrama by Jacques Doillon turns on a French romantic *acte gratuit*, a mad emotional commitment intricately rationalized, but the director's intensely disciplined approach to his subject—and to his actors—renders it plausible and moving, sternly classical and resolutely modern. Camille (Clémentine Beaugrand), a young Parisian with a certain grungy class, arrives in a grim, wintry northern seaside village in pursuit of Costa (Gérald Thomassin), a local grifter who spent the night with her and took off. She soon meets Cyril (Guillaume Saurrel), a plainclothes cop and Costa's childhood friend, but what starts as a tenuous triangle slips into a genre plot when Costa's relations with his ex-wife (Gwendoline Godquin) and young daughter (Noémie Herbet) turn on the need for fast money. The rail-thin Thomassin, all angles and scars and wounded bravado behind his scruffy mustache, and Beaugrand, a tall, pale beauty who hunches her shoulders and bows her head and peers out from beneath her brow through a floppy lock of hair, energetically tangle and trade etched phrases and aggressive silences in fluid long takes that seem composed of a series of sculptural tableaux. This intimate story, bringing together the northern light reflected off water, the cold wind, the fear of poverty, the weight of the past, and the lack of a future, has a soulful, epic grandeur. In French.—*R.B.* (French Institute Alliance Française; March 3.)

KATYŃ
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (Film Forum.)

LOUISIANA STORY
Two kinds of romantic American mythology—the can-do spirit of American industry and the beauty and folk wisdom of an unspoiled frontier—collide in Robert Flaherty's fascinating, awkward, luminous documentary-style drama, released in 1948, about drillers seeking oil in a Cajun family's bayou. The hero (Joseph Boudreaux) is like Huck Finn and Tom Sawyer rolled into one, yet, unlike Huck, he doesn't have to "light out for the territories": in the swampy clime he calls home, he's already beyond the reach of mainstream civilization. He befriends the oil rig's driller and boiler man, and tries to fuse modernity and magic, sprinkling the same mystic salt over the derrick that he uses to hook the biggest catfish these men have ever seen. Standard Oil funded the movie, and headlines proclaiming the oilmen's skill at limiting collateral damage may rouse snickers in contemporary audiences. Still, the movie is a powerful, swooning visualization of a wilderness childhood. Virgil Thomson's Pulitzer Prize-winning score puts impressionistic shimmers and dancing twists on rural themes; whenever the boy navigates the bayou in his pirogue, the evocative melodies merge seductively with Flaherty's infatuated imagery.—*Michael Sragow* (MOMA; Feb. 27-28.)

ME AND MY GAL
The native New Yorker Raoul Walsh's comic drama, from 1931, is a tangy tale of detectives, gangsters, and love on the Lower East Side. The story is a little tangled—it features the young Spencer Tracy as Officer Danny Dolan, who gets promoted to detective while pursuing Helen Reilly (Joan Bennett), a fast-talking waitress at a waterfront chowder house, as well as trailing a mobster, Duke Castenega (George Walsh, the director's brother), who happens to be the lover of Helen's sister (Marion Burns). But the plot is beside the point; Walsh fills the movie with a wild assortment of streetwise gestures, Depression-era miseries and wiles, plenty of pre-Code sexual innuendo, and a barrage of hard-boiled slang and sassy retorts. There's also an amazingly clever and tender takeoff on Eugene O'Neill's intellectual drama, which Danny recalls as "Strange Inner Tube," and plenty of the sort of gimcrack antics from the sidewalks of New York that nostalgia was made for. With the great silent-film actor Henry B. Walthall in a surprising silent role.—*R.B.* (Film Forum; March 2.)



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Ronsard, *Livret de folastries*, 43 etchings by Maillol, Paris, 1938 [i.e., 1940]. Estimate $4,000 to $6,000.

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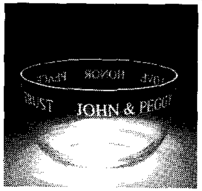

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MILK
Gus Van Sant's vibrantly entertaining bio-pic recreates, without starchiness, the San Francisco life of the gay activist and politician Harvey Milk (Sean Penn), who was assassinated in 1978, along with Mayor George Moscone, by a fellow-politician, the family-values conservative Dan White (Josh Brolin). The righteous march of events is warmed by the banter, the casual sex, and the candor of the gay milieu in the giddy seventies, the period just before AIDS, when life was free and easy. Much of the time, Penn keeps his voice down, but the fervor and humor are there in the most offhanded moments. Without ostentation, he creates a new body, a new temperament: he loosens his neck and shoulders and swivels his head; his smile is enormous and all-embracing; he holds an elbow out and pumps a forearm up and down like a semaphore as Harvey speaks in public. Brolin, a slab of hair lying low across his forehead, gives White a brick-headed, baffled manner, a tormented neediness. In the filmmakers' interpretation, there's a suggestion that White suffered from murderously repressed homosexuality.—*D.D.* (12/1/08) (In wide release.)

PAUL BLART: MALL COP
Kevin James must be feeling the love now that his latest film—about an overweight security guard who encounters a bunch of hapless thieves holding hostage a crowd of shoppers at a West Orange, New Jersey, mall—has turned out to be a smash hit. The movie is divided into two parts: the first is a sitcom-like look at Paul Blart's home life (he's a single dad with a daughter); the second is a semi-inventive comic take on the "Die Hard" movies, as James uses his surprisingly spry bulk to rescue the hostages. The story stays in family-friendly territory (there are no raunchy jokes or lessons about conspicuous consumption), and most of the mindless nonsense of the script (which James co-wrote with Nick Bakay) passes pleasantly, thanks to the rotund sweetness of James's performance. Directed by Steve Carr.—*B.D.* (In wide release.)

THE READER
The British director Stephen Daldry made a splash with "The Hours," and this new film is no less worthy, ambitious, and exasperating. The screenwriter, once again, is David Hare, who fillets the best-selling novel by Bernhard Schlink. For all Hare's expertise, however, we are stuck with the unsavory pretensions of the original tale. Kate Winslet plays Hanna, who, thirteen years after the Second World War, works on the trams in Neustadt, West Germany, and has occasional sex with a local teen-age boy named Michael (David Kross). Their first time, though lingeringly shot, has all the finesse of cheap porno; where else does a woman tell a lusty youth to shed his clothes and take a bath because he has dirt on his face? In the movie's second half, we see Hanna being tried and imprisoned for her wartime deeds; there is a shocking revelation, which comes as no surprise; and the middle-aged Michael (Ralph Fiennes) turns up to help his onetime love. Daldry takes things painfully slowly, not helped by a sappy score, and we are encouraged to muse upon the cultural shortcomings, or even improvements, in the life of an aging member of the S.S. This is not an issue that most of us feel the need to worry about. With a strong performance, late in the day, from Lena Olin.—*A.L.* (12/15/08) (In wide release.)

SLUMDOG MILLIONAIRE
An eighteen-year-old Muslim tea-boy named Jamal (Dev Patel), born and raised in the poverty of Mumbai, teeters on the verge of fame and fortune. A nation awaits. Such is the old-fashioned, sentimental cliffhanger to which the screenwriter Simon Beaufoy and the director Danny Boyle have, with unembarrassed drive, committed themselves. Jamal is a contestant on the Indian edition of "Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?," and the suspicion of the police—who, in an ill-judged prelude to the story, hold and torture him—is that he must have cheated. His response is that experience alone, whether wretched or comic, has by chance furnished him with the correct answers, and the bulk of the film, constructed from flashbacks, proves his point. The style, seen previously in "City of God" and other movies, is what you might call urban-manic: heated performances, even hotter colors, and camerawork that vies with the editing for nerve and speed. The lad at the center of it all is actually on the dull side, but the energy around him—not least in the dance sequence over the final credits—is difficult to resist.—*A.L.* (11/24/08) (In wide release.)

TAKEN
Liam Neeson plays a divorced father and former C.I.A. employee, who lives in Los Angeles to be near his immensely annoying teen-age daughter (Maggie Grace). When she is kidnapped on a trip to Paris, he tracks her down, taking the opportunity to combine his two favorite cultural interests: tender paternal love and indiscriminate homicide. First, he slaughters the Albanians who stole her, before moving on to the Arabs who want to buy her, and you feel quite sure that he would, if required, slash and thump his way through the rest of the alphabet. For those with a taste for political allegory, there is something to ponder here, although the director, Pierre Morel, together with his producer (and co-writer) Luc Besson, takes things at such a clip that little room is left for contemplation. The result is unrelenting, improbable, and humorless; Neeson, as domineering as ever, shades his feats of aggression with a solemn gravity that they scarcely deserve, and anyone raised on "An American in Paris" will weep to think how far we have travelled from Gene Kelly. That was a fantasy of international ease; this is a bad dream of revenge. With Famke Janssen.—*A.L.* (2/2/09) (In wide release.)

TWO LOVERS
If this really is the swan song of Joaquin Phoenix, as the actor has vowed, then it's a fine-looking swan to go out on. He plays Leonard, who lives in Brighton Beach with his parents, works in the family's dry-cleaning store, and seems not just troubled in mind but, as it were, only half-formed as an adult member of society. Not that this stops him from attracting the attention of beautiful women; first comes Sandra (Vinessa Shaw), the daughter of his parents' friends, followed shortly by Michelle (Gwyneth Paltrow), whose apartment overlooks his own, and who can boast a range of perplexities almost as broad as his own, what with her weakness for drugs and her reliance on the wallet of a married man (Elias Koteas). James Gray's film observes Leonard as he seesaws between these two alliances; as late as the final scene, we cannot tell which way he will tip, still less whether his choice will make him happy ever after. The overall result is a cramped and distressing movie that is somehow eased and opened out by its rich soundtrack and, above all, by the grace of its compositions. With Isabella Rossellini as Leonard's long-suffering mother.—*A.L.* (2/23/09) (In limited release.)

Also Playing

HE'S JUST NOT THAT INTO YOU: In wide release. **THE PINK PANTHER 2:** In wide release. **PUSH:** In wide release. **THE UNINVITED:** In wide release.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES
32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (212-505-5181)—"Essential Cinema." March 1 at 5:30: "Orpheus" (1950, Jean Cocteau; in French). ♦ March 1 at 7:30: "The Testament of Orpheus" (1959, Cocteau; in French).

BAM ROSE CINEMAS
30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-636-4100)—"Best of the African Diaspora Film Festival." Feb. 25 at 4:30: "Princess of Africa" (2008, Juan Laguna). ♦ Feb. 25 at 6:20: "The End of Poverty?" (2008, Philippe Diaz). ♦ Feb. 25 at 8:40: "Namibia: The Struggle for Liberation" (2007, Charles Burnett). ♦ Feb. 26 at 4:30: "Mr. President" (2006, Yorgos Avgeropoulos). ♦ Feb. 26 at 9:30: "Made in Jamaica" (2006, Jérôme Laperrousaz). ♦ In revival. Feb. 27 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15; Feb. 28-March 1 at 6:50 and 9:15; and March 2-5 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "Dillinger Is Dead" (1969, Marco Ferreri; in Italian).

FILM FORUM
W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110)—In revival. Feb. 25-March 3 at 1, 3:15, 5:30, 7:45, and 10: "Lola Montès" (1955, Max Ophüls; in French). ♦ Through March 5: "Breadlines and Champagne," Depression-era movies. Feb. 25 at 1:30, 4:40, and 7:50: "Little Caesar" (Mervyn LeRoy, 1931). ♦ Feb. 25 at 3:15, 6:25, and 9:35: "Two Seconds" (LeRoy, 1932). ♦ Feb. 26 at 1:30, 4:40, and 7:50: "No Greater Glory" (1934, Frank Borzage). ♦ Feb. 26 at 3, 6:10, and 9:20: "This Day and Age" (1933, Cecil B. De Mille). ♦ Feb. 27 at 1:30, 5:30, and 9:40: "Theodora Goes Wild" (1936, Richard Boleslawski). ♦ Feb. 27 at 3:25 and 7:30: "Mr. Deeds Goes to Town" (1936, Frank Capra). ♦ Feb. 28 at 1, 4:40, and 8:25: "42nd Street" (1933, Lloyd Bacon). ♦ March 1 at 1:30, 5:30, and 9:30: "Gold Diggers of 1933" (1933, LeRoy). ♦ March 1 at 3:30 and 7:30: "Footlight Parade" (1933, Bacon). ♦ March 2 at 1, 4, 7, and 10: "Central Park" (1932, John G. Adolfi). ♦ March 2 at 2:15, 5:15, and 8:15: "Me and My Gal" (†). ♦ March 3 at 1, 5:25, and 10:05: "Taxi!" (1932, Roy Del Ruth). ♦ March 3 at 2:25 and 6:50: "Lawyer Man" (1932, William Dieterle). ♦ March 3 at 3:50 and 8:30: "Blonde Crazy" (1931, Del Ruth).

FILM SOCIETY OF LINCOLN CENTER
Walter Reade Theatre, Lincoln Center (212-875-5610)—"*Film Comment* Selects." Feb. 25 at 6: "A Woman in Berlin" (2008, Max Färberböck; in German). ♦ Feb. 25 at 8:30: "Ladies and Gentlemen, the Fabulous Stains" (1981, Lou Adler). ♦ Feb. 27 at 8:45 and March 2 at 4:30: "Jerichow" (2008, Christian Petzold; in German). ♦ Feb. 28 at 1:30: "The Chaser" (2008, Na Hong-jin; in Korean). ♦ Feb. 28 at 4: "The Killing of Sister George" (1968, Robert Aldrich), introduced by the critic Melissa Anderson. ♦ Feb. 28 at 6:45: "Revanche" (2008, Götz Spielmann; in German and Russian). ♦ March 2 at 6:30 and March 3 at 4:30: "Better Things" (2008, Duane Hopkins). ♦ March 2 at 8:30 and March 3 at 6:30: "A Week Alone" (2007, Celina Murga; in Spanish). ♦ March 3 at 9: "Adam Resurrected" (2008, Paul Schrader). ♦ The films of Guy Debord. All films are in French. March 1 at 2: "In Girum Imus Nocte et Consumimur Igni" (†). ♦ March 1 at 4:10 and 8:40: "The Society of the Spectacle" (1973). ♦ March 1 at 6:15: "Screams in Favor of Sade" (1952) and two short films.

FRENCH INSTITUTE ALLIANCE FRANÇAISE
Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. (212-355-6160)—Through March 31: The films of Jacques Doillon. March 3 at 12:30, 4, and 7: "Just Anybody" (†). The 7 P.M. screening will be followed by a Q. & A. with the director.

IFC CENTER
323 Sixth Ave., at W. 3rd St. (212-924-7771)—"Waverly Midnights." Feb. 27-28: "Spider" (2002, David Cronenberg). ♦ "Stranger Than Fiction," a documentary series. March 3 at 8: "Girls Like Us" (1997, Jane C. Wagner and Tina DiFeliciantonio), followed by a Q. & A. with the directors.

JAPAN SOCIETY
333 E. 47th St., at First Ave. (212-715-1258)—"Shinjuku Ecstasy: Independent Films from the Art Theatre Guild of Japan." All films are in Japanese. Feb. 25 at 7:30: "Double Suicide" (1969, Masahiro Shinoda). ♦ Feb. 27 at 7:30: "This Transient Life" (1970, Akio Jissoji). ♦ Feb. 28 at 3: "A Man Vanishes" (1967, Shohei Imamura). ♦ Feb. 28 at 5:45: "Crazy Love" (1968, Michio Okabe). ♦ March 1 at 3: "Pitfall" (1962, Hiroshi Teshigahara). ♦ March 1 at 5:15: "Ecstasy of the Angels" (1972, Koji Wakamatsu).

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9480)—"Still Moving." Feb. 25-27 at 1:30: "Atlantic City" (1981, Louis Malle). ♦ "Documentary Fortnight 2009." Feb. 25 at 6: "Sync or Swim" (2008, Cheryl Furjanic), followed by a discussion with the director. ♦ Feb. 25 at 8:30: "Brooklyn DIY" (2009, Marcin Remocki), followed by a discussion with the director. ♦ The films of Angela Ricci Lucchi and Yervant Gianikian. Feb. 25 at 6: "Balkan Inventory" (2000). ♦ Feb. 25 at 8 and Feb. 26 at 9: "Prisoners of War" (1995). ♦ Feb. 27 at 6: "On the Heights All Is Peace" (1998). ♦ Feb. 28 at 2: "Visions of the Desert" (2000). ♦ Feb. 28 at 4:15: "Images of the East, Barbaric Tourism" (2001). ♦ "Collabora-

tions in the Collection." Feb. 26 at 6 and Feb. 27 at 8:30: "The Spanish Earth" (1937, Joris Ivens), plus two short films. ♦ Feb. 26 at 8:30 and Feb. 28 at 2: "Power and the Land" (1940, Ivens) and "The 400 Million" (1938, Ivens). ♦ Feb. 27 at 6 and Feb. 28 at 7: "The Land" (1942, Robert J. Flaherty) and "Louisiana Story" (†). ♦ "A Tribute to George C. Stoney." Feb. 27 at 8: "Flesh in Ecstasy: Gaston Lachaise and the Women He Loved" (2008, Stoney). ♦ Feb. 28 at 5:45: "The Uprising of 1934" (1995, Stoney, Judith Helfand, and Susanne Rostock). ♦ Feb. 28 at 7:45: "How the Myth Was Made" (1978, Stoney). ♦ Special screenings. March 2 at 6:30: "Night of the Hunter" (1955, Charles Laughton). ♦ March 4 at 6 and March 5 at 5: "The French Connection" (1971, William Friedkin). ♦ "Filmmaker in Focus: Ramin Bahrani." March 4 at 6:15 and March 7 at 6: "Man Push Cart" (2005). ♦ March 4 at 8:15 and March 6 at 6: "Chop Shop" (2007).

RUBIN MUSEUM OF ART
150 W. 17th St. (212-620-5000)—"Cabaret Cinema." Feb. 27: "I Vitelloni" (1953, Federico Fellini; in Italian), introduced by Antonio Monda.

READINGS AND TALKS

MERCANTILE LIBRARY CENTER FOR FICTION
The mystery writers Jedediah Berry, Paul Tremblay, and Alex Berenson read from their work. (17 E. 47th St. For reservations, which are encouraged, call 212-755-6710. Feb. 25 at 7.)

EAMON GRENNAN
The Irish poet talks to Alice Quinn, the executive director of the Poetry Society of America, about his work. (Lillian Vernon Creative Writers House, New York University, 58 W. 10th St. No tickets necessary. Feb. 26 at 7.)

THE MORGAN LIBRARY & MUSEUM
Jennifer Tonkovich, a curator of drawings and prints at the Morgan, gives a gallery talk about the state of drawing in nineteenth-century Germany and France. (Madison Ave. at 36th St. 212-685-0008. Feb. 27 at 7.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

FESTIVAL OF NEW FRENCH WRITING
Nearly a dozen French authors talk with American writers during this free three-day gathering. Highlights include conversations between the philosopher Bernard-Henri Lévy and the journalist Mark Danner; between Marjane Satrapi, the author of "Persepolis," and the cartoonist Chris Ware, moderated by Françoise Mouly, the art editor for this magazine; and between the novelist and filmmaker Emmanuel Carrère and the writer Francine Prose. (Vanderbilt Hall, New York University, 40 Washington Sq. S. Feb. 26-28. For a complete schedule, visit www.frenchwritingfestival.com.)

"BRAINWAVE"
The Rubin Museum of Art's annual festival exploring how art, music, and mediation affect the mind is under way. This week, the psychiatrist Mark Epstein gives a free talk about the new edition of his seminal book about Buddhism and contemporary life, "Going on Being." (150 W. 17th St. 212-620-5000, ext. 344. Feb. 27 at 7:30.)

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES
Nesting appears to be on everyone's mind, at least in the auctions circuit. **Christie's** is doing its part with one of its "Interiors" sales of furniture, lamps, prints, clocks, and everything else for the home, at reasonable prices (March 3-4). (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 212-636-2000.) ♦ In a similar spirit, **Doyle** offers its "decorators" sale, "Doyle at Home" (Feb. 25), full of dishes, armoires, and comfy armchairs. (175 E. 87th St. 212-427-2730.) ♦ **Sotheby's** focusses on what lies beneath—carpets, that is. But not just any old rugs: on March 3 the house will be auctioning off pieces from the collection of Barbara Zidell Sedlin, owner of the New York store the Ghiordian Knot, who is retiring from the carpet business. (York Ave. at 72nd St. 212-606-7000.) ♦ **Bloomsbury** combines posters and books in a sale (Feb. 25) that features early-twentieth-century advertisements for such pleasant destinations as the rugged mountain villages of Andalusia and the Austrian ski slopes, as well as a performance poster for the irrepressible Josephine Baker, bursting with colored pompoms. (6 W. 48th St. 212-719-1000.) ♦ In a similar vein, the Park Avenue Armory hosts the **Works on Paper** fair (Feb. 27-March 2), where gallerists and dealers from the U.S. and Europe present prints, watercolors, drawings, and illustrated books, ranging from Old Master works to pieces by Picasso, Botero, and Peter Doig. (Park Ave. at 67th St. 212-777-5218.)

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EDEL RODRIGUEZ

ON THE HORIZON

MOVIES
FRENCH CONFECTION
March 5-15

This year's edition of "Rendez-Vous with French Cinema," at the Film Society of Lincoln Center, brings to town new work from such masters as Agnès Varda (the self-portrait "The Beaches of Agnès"), Claude Chabrol ("Bellamy," a thriller), and Costa-Gavras ("Eden Is West," a political drama), as well as Benoît Jacquot's "Villa Amalia," starring Isabelle Huppert, and "Mesrine," a two-part biopic about the famed French criminal. (212-875-5610.)

THE THEATRE
KING OF COMEDY
March 7

The star parade on Broadway continues, as Geoffrey Rush, in his Broadway début, joins Susan Sarandon, Lauren Ambrose, and Andrea Martin in Ionesco's "Exit the King," at the Barrymore. (212-239-6200.)

NIGHT LIFE
BRAZILIAN BEATS
March 13-14

The World Music Institute's Brasil Fest brings two of São Paulo's most compelling young singers to Symphony Space. The vocalist Mariana Aydar makes her American début on the first night, and Jair Oliveira, son of the legendary samba singer Jair Rodrigues, headlines the second night's program. (212-545-7536.)

ART
GAME ON
March 13-June 14

"KRAZY! The Delirious World of Anime, Manga, and Video Games," at the Japan Society, will invite visitors to play Pac-Man and Super Mario World, browse through nearly a thousand magazines in a specially designed "manga pod," and view excerpts of such cult films as "Akira." (212-832-1155.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
MAMA KNOWS BEST
March 16

The climax of "Honor!," Carnegie Hall's festival of African-American music curated by Jessye Norman, is "Ask Your Mama!," a new music-and-multimedia fantasy (based on poetry by Langston Hughes) by the composer Laura Karpman; Norman is its star, along with the hip-hop group the Roots. (212-247-7800.)

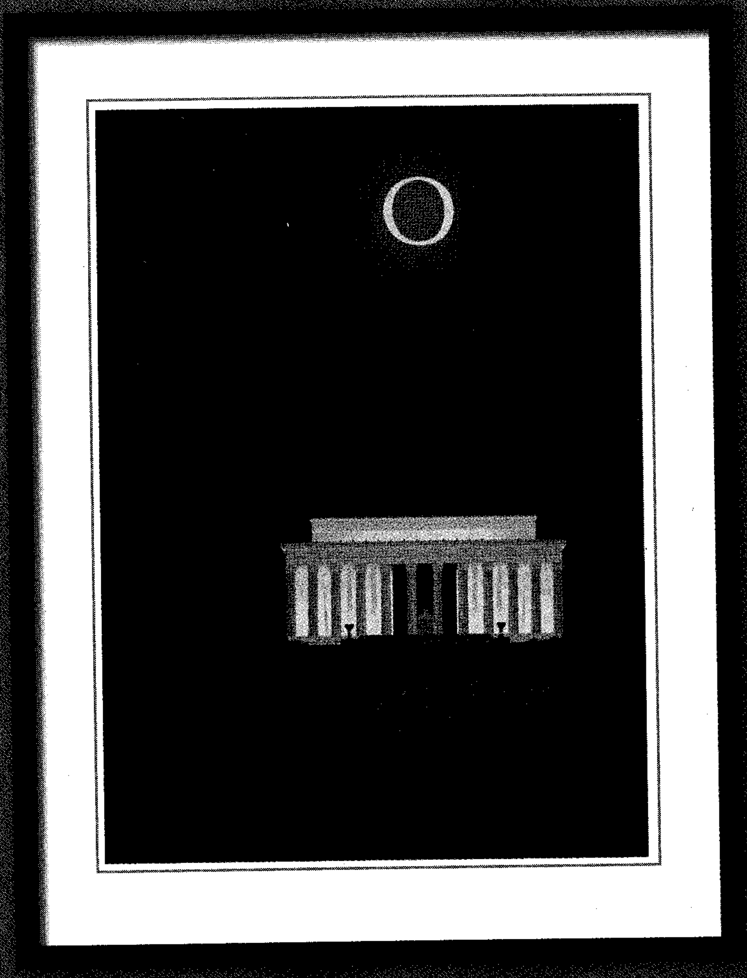
Jessye Norman, at Carnegie Hall.

Advertisement

REFLECTION

by Bob Staake

Issue date: November 17, 2008



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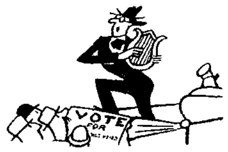
THE NEW YORKER

THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT
VOTER, BEWARE

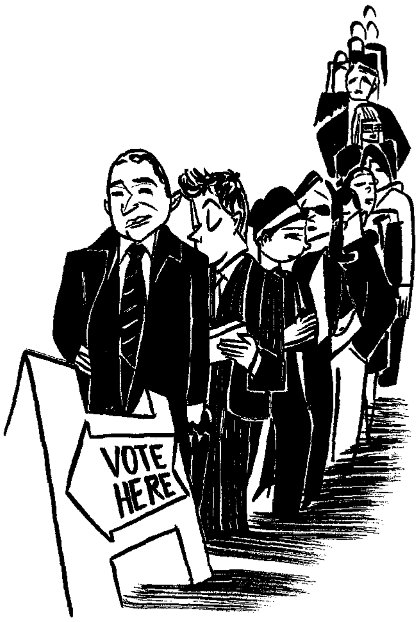


The Voting Rights Act, which passed in 1965, stands as one of the great monuments to civil rights in American history. The Fifteenth Amendment, ratified in 1870, purported to give Americans the right to vote regardless of "race, color, or previous condition of servitude," but it was not until a century later, with the passage of the act, that the right was enforced, and Southern blacks were finally free to cast a ballot. Over the years, an ideologically diverse group of Supreme Court Justices has reviewed and approved the constitutionality of the act many times. But, in a case to be argued before the Court this spring, the current conservative majority has a chance to undo this signal achievement of American democracy.

Section 5 of the act, which is at issue in Northwest Austin Municipal Utility District No. 1 v. Holder, is what gave the legislation teeth. That provision singles out by name those states and counties with especially notorious histories of discriminating against African-Americans, through such mechanisms as literacy tests, character tests, and poll taxes. The law not only eradicated these obstacles; it went a crucial step further. It decreed that if the "covered jurisdictions" wanted to change their voting procedures in any way—from redrawing district lines in the state legislature to moving the location of a solitary polling place—they first had to obtain permission from the Justice Department. (Congress reauthorized the Voting Rights Act in 1970, 1975, 1982, and 2006, and in the process expanded its coverage to include several Western states with histories of discriminating against Hispanic and Native American voters.) The process of review by the Justice Department, which is known as "preclearance," has been remarkably effective.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

And that is the point of the lawsuit. Some of the jurisdictions covered by Section 5 now want to be released from this form of federal receivership. As the lower court in the case put it, the plaintiffs argue that the preclearance provision should be found unconstitutional "because Congress 'irrationally and incongruously' chose to continue imposing 'disproportionate' burdens and a 'badge of shame' on covered jurisdictions on the basis of an 'ancient formula' and 'conditions that existed thirty or more years ago but have long since been remedied.' " What is the proof? The plaintiffs stated it in the first line of their brief: "The America that has elected Barack Obama as its first African-American president is far different than when Section Five was first enacted in 1965."



To paraphrase the President: Yes it is. The formula for determining which jurisdictions are covered is largely based on election results from 1964, a time that is nearly a half century, and a world, away from our own. Almost all of Virginia and much of North Carolina are covered jurisdictions under Section 5, and Obama won both states. Moreover, the Justice Department has for some time been approving ninety-nine per cent of the electoral changes submitted by covered jurisdictions. As Representative Lynn Westmoreland, a Georgia Republican, put it in arguing against the most recent reauthorization of the law, "Congress is declaring from on high that states with voting problems forty years ago can simply never be forgiven—that Georgians must eternally wear the scarlet letter because of the actions of their grandparents and great-grandparents. We have repented and we have reformed, and now, as Fannie Lou Hamer famously said, 'I'm sick and tired of being sick and tired.' " There is something unseemly, to say the least, about conservatives who have opposed the Voting Rights Act now toasting its success, particularly as that success is incomplete.

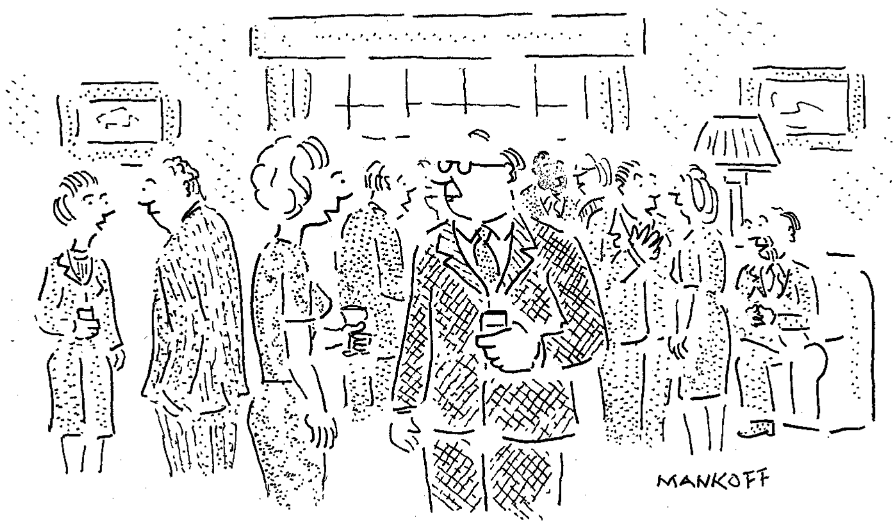
Barack Obama won the Presidency,

but voting patterns in the Deep South suggest that race remains a major factor in American political life. As part of a brief in the Northwest Austin case, Professor Nathaniel Persily, of Columbia Law School, shows how poorly Obama did with white Democrats in those states. According to Persily's analysis of the 2008 returns, Obama received forty-seven per cent of the white vote in states that are not covered under Section 5 but won only twenty-six per cent of the white vote in covered states. "Barack Obama actually did worse among whites than John Kerry in several of the covered jurisdictions, despite the nationwide Democratic swing," Persily writes. Race seems like the best explanation for this difference. The fact that other African-American candidates have failed so often and for so long with white voters in the South indicates that no one should be in a hurry to declare the United States a "post-racial" society.

What recent electoral history shows is that voting requires broader, not narrower, protection. In many parts of the country, the voting rights of poor and minority citizens are treated with not so benign neglect. In the 2000 election, African-American voters in Florida suffered disproportionately from that state's shoddy practices, such as inadequately maintained registration lists and inferior technology; in 2004, many minority voters in Ohio endured long lines waiting for balky, and too few, voting machines. Across the nation, laws that remove the franchise from those with criminal convictions hit minorities especially hard. More directly, the Republican Party has made an institutional commitment to eradicate the nonexistent problem of voter fraud by imposing identification requirements that are obviously aimed at limiting the numbers of voters from demographic groups that favor Democrats. But neither Florida nor Ohio is a covered jurisdiction under Section 5, and the act is not written to address new techniques of suppression. Three years ago, Congress ducked the problem by simply reauthorizing the old law and giving it a fatuous new name, the Fannie Lou Hamer, Rosa Parks, and Coretta Scott King Voting Rights Act Reauthorization and Amendments Act of 2006. For the legislators, this was heroism by association, not heroism in fact.

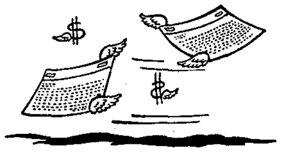
Viewing Obama's election as an opportunity to tidy up the nation's historical accounts is tempting but ultimately wrong. Yet even if the Court's conservatives succeed in taking out Section 5 they cannot reverse the course of a changed and changing nation. In the Court's great affirmative-action case of 2003, in which it upheld racial preference in admissions at the University of Michigan Law School, Justice Sandra Day O'Connor's opinion suggested that by 2028 such measures should no longer be necessary. The Voting Rights Act expires in 2031. Thanks in part to the election of Barack Obama, it is now plausible to believe that the day will come when the act, too, will no longer be necessary.

—*Jeffrey Toobin*



"True, a salary cap on Wall Street may limit the talent pool, but, on the other hand, if they get any more talented we'll all be broke."

BLOW, WINDS
PAPER CHASE



For the past few weeks, forty-six cardboard boxes sat moldering on the waterfront in Long Island City, not far from where workers were reassembling the seventy-two-year-old neon Pepsi sign. The boxes were on Fifth Street, which dead-ends in Anable Basin, where a mastodon bone was dredged up more than a century ago when a creek was transformed into a barge slip. On a blustery day last week, old paperbacks, videotapes, and financial papers were spilling out of the boxes onto the street, to be scattered by the winds.

"You can find some of the books two blocks away now," John Muller, a furniture designer, said, standing outside his studio in a former meat-processing plant. "But have you seen the Madoff papers? I've been grabbing them for my banker friends so they can frame them as souvenirs."

Among the pale-green ledger sheets and torn paperbacks were wads of "trade confirmations" from Bernard L. Madoff Investment Securities, most of them dated 1993. They all appeared to document sales and purchases of blue-chip stocks (three hundred and eighty-five shares of Exxon Corp. for $24,062.50; a hundred and seventy-five shares of "Disney Walt Prodtns" for $7,284.38), but some described purchases of shares in companies, like American International Group (a hundred and five shares for $9,423.75) and General Motors (a hundred and forty-five shares for $7,956.88), that nearly joined the mastodon in recent months.

The Madoff materials were discovered on February 16th by Matt Quigley, Muller's landlord, who, fed up with the mess outside his building, decided to investigate. "I was looking for a name on the papers, to see if it was one of our tenants who dumped the garbage on the street," Quigley said. When he saw the letterhead reading "Bernard L. Madoff," he said, "I thought, I've heard that guy's name before."

Less well known is the Madoff investor to whom the documents were issued, a Manhattan resident named Juliet Nierenberg. A Google search revealed that Nierenberg is a vice-president of the Negotiation Institute, an executive-training firm based in the Empire State Building. The institute espouses the belief that an "'Everybody Wins®' philosophy . . . creates longer-lasting and more successful outcomes than the adversarial 'winner takes all' approach." Near the sodden boxes, several videotapes of a Negotiation Institute presentation to General Motors, titled "Everybody Wins Through Successful Negotiating," unspooled on the asphalt. There were also piles of business self-help books, written or co-written by Nierenberg's husband, Gerard I. Nierenberg, the founder of the Negotiation Institute. Among the titles: "Workable Ethics: What You Need to Succeed in Business and in Life," "How to Give Yourself Good Advice," and "You're the Expert: How You Can Solve Your Problems in Business and in Life." Two books might have proved useful for the Nierenbergs in their business with Madoff: "Meta-Talk: How to Uncover the Hidden Meanings in What People Say" and "How to Read a Person Like a Book."

"I guess they neglected to keep up their storage rent and somebody threw their stuff out there," Muller speculated.

Reached by telephone last week, Mrs. Nierenberg, who is eighty-four, was surprised to hear about the recovered records. "I'm so happy that you found them," she said, explaining that she and her husband had been putting together all the documentation of their transactions with Madoff in order to file a claim with the Securities Investor Protection Corporation. The trades may be fictitious; investigators suspect that Madoff never executed many of the trades that he'd claimed he was making. When you see the slips now, each with the information filled in as if by an electric typewriter, you begin to appreciate how much scut work a fraud of this magnitude would have required. For Madoff to have pulled it off himself, you can imagine that he would have had to fill out fake slips day and night, or to have deployed a Ponzi robot.

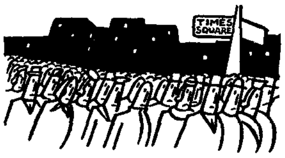
Mr. Nierenberg confirmed that the couple's boxes had been in a storage facility, and said that they had given up the lease to cut costs. "I had my son hire some people to go to the storage place and pick the stuff up and dump it professionally," he said. "I wonder why they didn't just dump it in the river?" The couple said that they had been investing with Madoff for twenty years. "We lost a million dollars," Mr. Nierenberg said. "It's changed our whole life."

When Muller heard that the Nierenbergs had been located, he said that he planned to gather up the stray papers and return them. Quigley, his landlord, said, "I had been thinking about calling the woman, to tell her to come clean up her garbage. But I figured she has enough problems right now, right?"

—*Erik Baard*

THE BOARDS

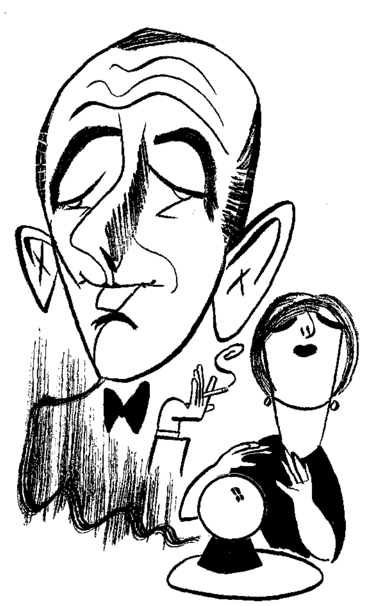
NOTES FROM BEYOND



"We have no reliable guarantee that the afterlife will be any less exasperating than this one, have we?" Noël Coward wrote in his 1941 comedy "Blithe Spirit." The play will soon be revived at the Shubert, with Angela Lansbury starring as a medium who accidentally conjures an Englishman's deceased first wife, much to the consternation of his second. A few weeks ago, the producers put out a call for an official psychic consultant, someone who could work with the cast "to guarantee that each performance is every bit as genuine as possible." As proof of their abilities, applicants were invited to summon Coward, who died in 1973, and who one imagines was thoroughly exasperated by the attention.

Auditions were held on a Thursday at noon, on the second floor of Sardi's. Twenty-odd mediums, dressed to varying degrees of witchiness, flooded the bar; each would have two minutes to make an impression. The judges were Christine Ebersole, who plays the conjured spirit and herself believes in the occult (she saw a ghost when she was five); Jeffrey Richards, one of the show's producers, who described his position on the paranormal as "curious"; and Michael Blakemore, the director, who wouldn't say, lest he "curse the production." A casting director took attendance and asked the auditioners to "stay where we can find you," which presumably meant in the corporeal realm.

First up was Jackie Barrett, a severe-looking woman with a sharp black bob and a pentagram necklace. "I'm the real deal," she told the judges, and explained that she had helped homicide detectives solve approximately three hundred cold cases by contacting deceased victims. Richards asked if she had been in touch with Coward. She hadn't, but said that she had channelled other celebrities, including Alfred Hitchcock, Harry Houdini, Andy Warhol ("who I've had my own past with"), and George Washington. Barrett was not the only medium with V.I.P. connections; others claimed to have contacted Janis Joplin, Fanny Brice, a member of the British Royal Family ("but I'm not name-dropping"), and Elaine Stritch (admittedly still "on the earth plane").


Noël Coward and medium

Paula Roberts, who was born in Yorkshire and hosts a public-access show called "The English Psychic," said that she had "quite unexpectedly" channelled Marilyn Monroe while evaluating a fourposter bed thought to have come from Monroe and Joe DiMaggio's honeymoon cottage. "It was almost an attack," Roberts recalled. The judges were impressed by Roberts's résumé (classes at the Spiritualist Association of Great Britain, a writeup in the *Journal of the American Society for Psychical Research*) as well as by her accent. "She could go on as the understudy," Ebersole whispered.

Other contenders sensed paranormal activity right on the premises. "There is a woman here—I think her name is Ellen or Helen," a psychic named Anne Bradshaw told the panel. "She says, 'Keep tapping.' "

Richards blanched: "My mother's name was Helen!" (He wasn't sure about the tapping.) Another, Jeremy Wilson, said, "I'm getting the name James—does someone have a James in the family? And something to do with sheep—a shepherd? And the name Springwell. Does that mean anything?" It did: Blakemore's great-grandfather James Litchfield kept sheep, and Springwell was his homestead. Blakemore was astonished: "He has an amazing ability to channel my autobiography" ("Arguments with England: A Memoir," available in paperback).

And what of Coward? "I've been getting him all week," Janet Horton, who had on a beret and a yellow scarf, said. She'd seen him "sitting on an old stone wall, with his arms and legs crossed, very debonair," bearing a message for Ebersole: "He has complete confidence in you. The only thing he cares about is the lighting—he wants you in violet."

Vincent Presti, an attorney who conjures on the side, produced several pages of notes from Coward himself. "He wants to thank you for your attention to his work," Presti said. "He's pushing for a film remake." To Ebersole: "'Be careful of your driver. He will not keep time well.'" To Richards: "'Avoid those dreaded discount flyers.'" And, finally: "'If anyone can figure out a way for me to collect my royalties posthumously, I will hurry up and reincarnate.'"

Once the mediums had left, the judges reviewed the roster (Ebersole: "This one scared the shit out of me") and unanimously selected Paula Roberts, on the merit of her Englishness. Reached a few days later, Roberts said that she was "utterly tickled pink," if not surprised. "I actually gave myself a reading about it before the audition, and one never knows about these things, but it was very emphatically *yes*."

—Michael Schulman

DEPT. OF HOOPLA
GITMO GET-TOGETHER

Forgive a few Chelsea residents for staring in confusion at a sign that was recently taped to their building's front door: a "Gitmo Party"—the neighbors in 6-E were throwing one—does, on first glance, seem akin to "Abu Ghraib Cocktails" or "Prom Night in Peshawar." In the elevator, people talked about executive orders and federal judges who misinterpret them. These were defense lawyers, a mordant and heroic caste. Their host was Anthony Romero, the national director of the American Civil Liberties Union, and the occasion was the issuance, by President Obama, of a directive that would shut down the prison camp at Guantánamo within a year. Romero had written, in an e-mail:

> Dear Friends,
> This has been an amazing week for the restoration of the rule of law. . . . This is not an ACLU party, it is OUR party, and I'm just footing the bill. If we run out of wine and liquor because we stay long into the night regaling each other with war stories, the most sober among us will run to the local wine shop. If we run out of food and are still hungry, we will order take-out Chinese.

Drinking rum amid miniature Cuban *banderas* were the lions of the criminal-defense bar, lawyers whose clients have included white supremacists, environmental terrorists, Zacarias Moussaoui, the Unabomber, and Wen Ho Lee. Khalid Sheikh Mohammed's lawyers from the Guantánamo tribunals were in attendance. "K.S.M., we had our own team personality," Lieutenant Colonel Mike Acuff, a military attorney from Chattanooga, recalled. "We were the team that liked to ride around on the mules like a little golf cart."

Tom Durkin, the Chicago attorney—he defended Matt Hale, the self-proclaimed Pontifex Maximus of the World Church of the Creator—said that he "wouldn't have missed this party for the world." Over the past four years, Durkin has made seven trips to Guantánamo. Initially, he was hesitant to get involved with the defense project, which was assembled by the A.C.L.U. He recalled, "I said to them, 'Let me speak to my managing partner and get back to you.'" He was referring to his wife, Janis Roberts, who stood beside him. "We have six kids who had to eat and go to college," she pointed out. "He said, 'I want to do this.' And, in hindsight, I know we did the right thing."

Several of Durkin's clients, including a Sudanese detainee named Walid Ali, have refused to speak to him. In the spring of 2007, Durkin travelled to Khartoum, met with Ali's family, and obtained a letter—from the Sudanese government to Condoleezza Rice—that apparently helped to secure his release. Ali spoke to him then.

Around 9 P.M., Romero clanged a fork against a glass. He proposed a toast: "To a moment—a *moment*—where we can stop and celebrate, even though I know our hearts are going to be broken someday soon." (Sure enough, within a week Romero was excoriating Obama for having "reneged" on his promise to "reform the abuse of state secrets.")

Then a lawyer named Jeff Robinson addressed the crowd ("We have to make sure this isn't a 'Mission Accomplished' moment"), as did Nancy Hollander, from Albuquerque, who helped defend Wen Ho Lee. She represents Mohamedou Ould Slahi, a Mauritanian detainee, and she recalled, "I said to Mr. Slahi, 'Why don't you write down everything your interrogators have asked you?,' and he goes, 'Are you kidding me? I've been interrogated every day for five years. That's like asking Charlie Sheen to write down all his wives!'"

Across the room, guests traded Gitmo reminiscences: of the food ("The Clipper Club has the worst pizza in the entire world"), the bathrooms ("I used a Gatorade bottle"), the weird late nights ("Remember when the Filipino contractor crews brought out a karaoke machine?"; "Van pulls up and it's the Denver Broncos cheerleaders"). The latest gossip was that, on the night Obama was elected, someone at the base had started a conga line at two in the morning, pissing off the military prosecutors. Someone speculated that it was members of "the Ramzi Binalshibh crew." (They have denied the allegation.)

Earlier, Larry Cox, the executive director of Amnesty International USA, had spoken. He said, "This is a Walt Whitman moment where we can celebrate ourselves, but I think we're also here to remember some of the nonlawyers in the fight." He went on, "There are more people in this room than there were at some of these protests. Where were you all?"

Somebody shouted, "In Gitmo!"

—Lauren Collins

THE FINANCIAL PAGE

NICE WORK IF YOU CAN GET IT

This is the Age of the Incredible Shrinking Everything. Home prices, the stock market, G.D.P., corporate profits, employment: they're all a fraction of what they once were. Yet amid this carnage there is one thing that, surprisingly, has continued to grow: the paycheck of the average worker. Companies are slashing payrolls: 3.6 million people have lost their jobs since the recession started, with half of those getting laid off in just the past three months. Yet average hourly wages jumped almost four per cent in the past year. It's harder and harder to find and keep a job, but if you've got one you may well be making more than you did twelve months ago.

This combination of rising unemployment and higher wages seems improbable. But, as it turns out, it's what history would lead us to expect. Even during the early years of the Great Depression, manufacturing workers actually saw their real wages rise, and wage cuts have been scarce in every recession since. Oil and wheat prices may rise and fall instantaneously to reflect supply and demand, but wages are "sticky": even when the economy goes bad, it takes a lot to make them fall.

It's not because businesses are generous that wages are sticky; it's because employers are worried. In part, bosses are afraid of what economists call "adverse selection": if they cut wages, it's the least productive workers who would be the most likely to stay, while the best workers would start looking elsewhere. (Even in a weak economy, businesses still compete for talent.) In a 1997 study of almost two hundred employers, the economists Carl Campbell and Kunal Kamlani found that the threat of losing their best employees was a major reason that bosses didn't cut wages.

Even more important is the impact of wage cuts on morale. After the 1990-91 recession, the economist Truman Bewley interviewed managers and labor officials at more than two hundred companies and found that most believed that wage cuts wreck employee morale and eat away at productivity. Whatever money they'd save by cutting wages, bosses assume, would be cancelled out by the decline in effort and the breakdown of trust that wage cuts would create. Not everyone believes this: in the past month, both Hewlett-Packard and FedEx have announced plans for pay cuts. But generally, when sales and profits drop, wages aren't cut, even in firms undergoing layoffs. Of course, layoffs don't exactly help morale, but, as one of the bosses that Bewley interviewed coldly put it, they "get the misery out the door." Cutting wages keeps the misery around.

Today's sticky wages aren't just the result of custom, though. They've also stayed high because of the most unusual aspect of this recession: even as the economy has cratered, American workers have become more productive, not less. Productivity—how much output workers produce per hour of work—is the key to a healthy economy. Historically, productivity has been "procyclical": it rose during booms and fell during recessions. But not this time. Even as the economy did a cliff dive in the last quarter, productivity rose an impressive 3.1 per cent. And since, in theory, workers get paid more the more productive they are, their increased productivity has helped them avoid pay cuts.

In times as grim as these, stable wages and higher productivity seem like good things. But they come at a price. The reason that companies have remained so productive despite the slowdown has a lot to do with one of the most celebrated efficiency gains of recent years: the so-called just-in-time economy. In past recessions, companies often delayed firing people, because, in their uncertainty over the precise state of their business, they preferred to keep people around rather than go to the trouble of firing them and having to hire replacements later. In economist-speak, companies "hoarded labor." But during the past two decades companies have got significantly better at responding quickly to changes in the marketplace. Retailers carry less inventory; manufacturers have shorter lead times on production. This made the system as a whole more efficient, and each individual worker more productive. But it has also made redundant workers more expendable, and labor hoarding a thing of the past.

Bad times have always meant job losses, of course. But what's distinctive about the speed and depth of today's job cuts is that, even before the recession hit, American companies were, by historical standards, running lean operations. While the economy grew at a respectable rate for much of this decade, hiring did not. So one might have thought that companies would have had less room to slash payrolls, since they were already relatively slim. Instead, the same companies that were slow to hire after the last recession have been fast to fire during this one. G.D.P., after all, actually grew for much of 2008. Yet every month companies were cutting jobs. And after the credit crisis erupted, in September, companies wasted no time: as fast as consumer spending was plummeting, businesses were cutting payrolls even more aggressively. Companies have always wanted to do more with less; nowadays it's a positive obsession.

For the employed, then, this recession may be less than awful—if, that is, you can forget about the value of your home and your 401(k). But the very factors that benefit people with jobs—higher productivity and sticky wages—make prospects bleaker for those without them. That's one reason that it was important for the stimulus package to extend and increase unemployment benefits, as well as create jobs. We're a more productive, more efficient economy than ever, but that's cold comfort when you're on the dole.

—*James Surowiecki*

CHRISTOPH NIEMANN

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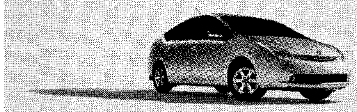

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LETTER FROM WASHINGTON

THE GATEKEEPER

Rahm Emanuel on the job.

BY RYAN LIZZA

Rahm Emanuel's office, which is no more than a three-second walk from the Oval Office, is as neat as a Marine barracks. On his desk, the files and documents, including leather-bound folders from the National Security Council, are precisely arranged, each one parallel with the desk's edge. During a visit hours before Congress passed President Barack Obama's stimulus package, on Friday, February 13th, I absently jostled one of Emanuel's heavy wooden letter trays a few degrees off kilter. He glared at me disapprovingly. Next to his computer monitor is a smaller screen that looks like a handheld G.P.S. device and tells Emanuel where the President and senior White House officials are at all times. Over all, the office suggests the workspace of someone who, in a more psychologized realm than the West Wing of the White House and with a less exacting job than that of the President's chief of staff, might be cited for "control issues."

Because the atmosphere of crisis is now so thick at the White House, any moment of triumph has a fleeting half-life, but the impending passage of the seven-hundred-and-eighty-seven-billion-dollar stimulus bill provided, at least for an afternoon, a sense of satisfaction. As Emanuel spoke about the complications of the legislation, he was quick to credit colleagues for shepherding the bill to victory—Peter Orszag, the budget director; Phil Schiliro, the legislative-affairs director; Jason Furman, the deputy director of the National Economic Council—but, in fact, nearly everyone in official Washington acknowledges that, besides Obama himself, Emanuel had done the most to coax and bully the bill out of Congress and onto the President's desk for signing.

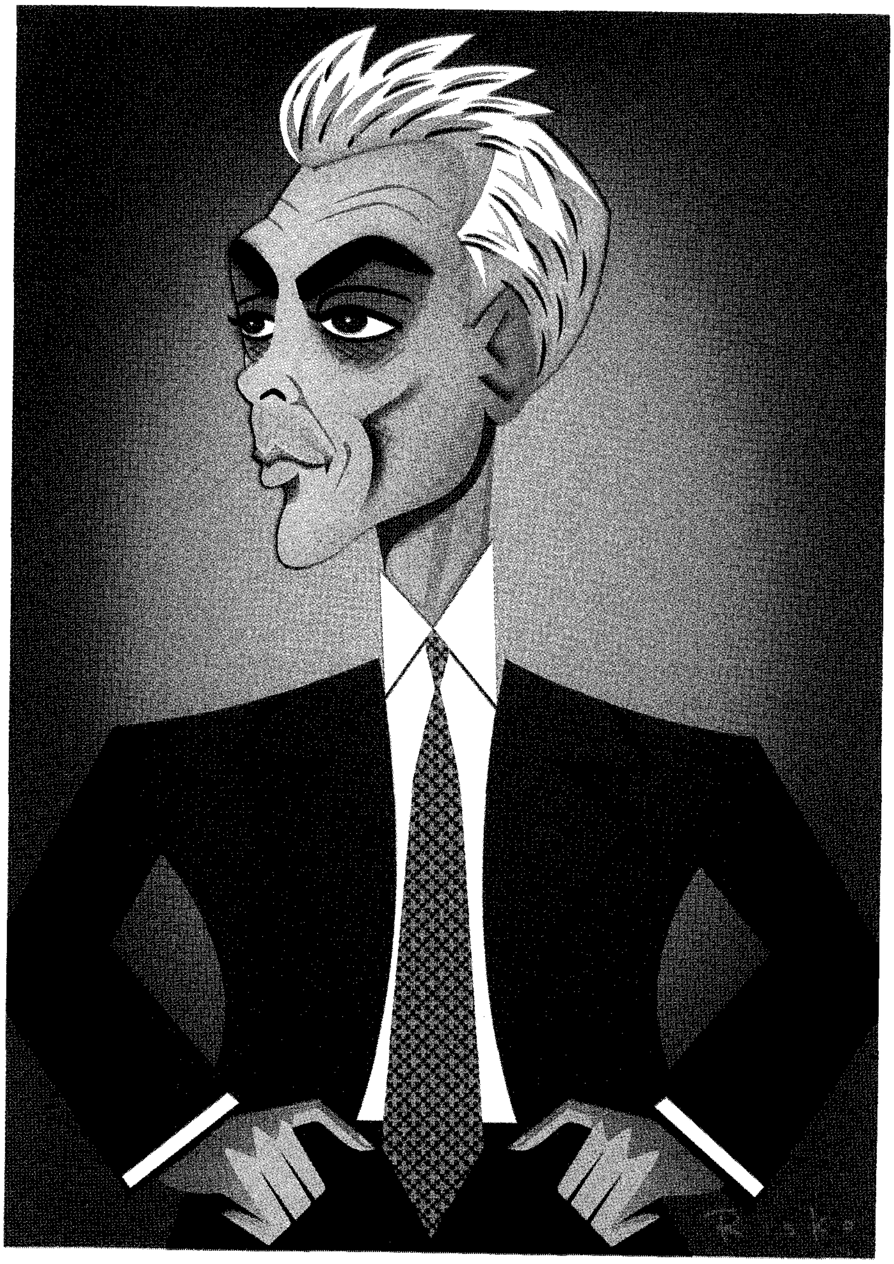
That afternoon, Emanuel and his team were already concentrating on the next major project: the President's budget, which will be released on February 26th. Emanuel had just come from a budget meeting in the Roosevelt Room with the President's senior staff. (The President was downstairs in the Situation Room; coincidentally or not, hours later U.S. Predators attacked a Pakistani Taliban compound in South Waziristan.) After the budget meeting broke up, staffers hurried through the West Wing reception area: Carol Browner, who is in charge of energy policy; Larry Summers, Obama's top economic adviser; Gene Sperling, an adviser to the Treasury Secretary; Orszag; Furman. Like Emanuel, all had worked in the Clinton Administration, all are strong-willed, and all know how to navigate the White House bureaucracy to advance their views. Emanuel personally recruited several of them, and it is now his job to manage their competing egos.

Hard copies of that morning's issue of *Politico* were strewn across desks in the West Wing; the paper depicted Emanuel on its front page as a lordly giant ruling over the White House, Congress, and the rest of Washington's political architecture. Not all the world's commentators, however, were as awestruck by his achievements. In *Granma*, the Cuban government's leading propaganda organ, Fidel Castro wrote of Emanuel, "Never in my life have I heard or read about any student or compatriot with that name, among tens of thousands." After a rambling meditation on the similarities between the chief of staff and Immanuel Kant, the retired jefe concluded that "Obama, Emanuel and all of the brilliant politicians and economists who have come together would not suffice to solve the growing problems of U.S. capitalist society."

Emanuel, for his part, seemed indifferent both to the praise in Washington and to the oddball critique from Havana. In a few hours, he would be leaving for a ski trip with his family to Park City, Utah, and he was anxious to get out of the White House and start the weekend. Asked about Castro's article, he said, "Well, you know, ever since I stopped sending him my holiday card he's been ticked off. I don't know what to think about it. Do you know what I'm thinking about? I'm going to finally get to see my kids after a month. So that's all I give a fuck about."

Unlike recent chiefs of staff from the Bush and Clinton eras, who tended to be relatively quiet inside players, Emanuel is a former congressional leader, a Democratic Party power, and one of the more colorful Beltway celebrities. He is a political John McEnroe, known for both his mercurial temperament and his tactical brilliance. In the same conversation, he can be wonkish and thoughtful, blunt and profane. (When Emanuel was a teen-ager, he lost half of his right middle finger, after cutting it on a meat slicer—an accident, Obama once joked, that "rendered him practically mute.") And, like McEnroe, Emanuel seems to employ his volcanic moments for effect, intimidating opponents and referees alike but never quite losing himself in the midst of battle. "I've seen Rahm scream at a candidate for office one moment and then quickly send him a cheesecake," Chris Van Hollen, a Democratic representative from Maryland, and a friend of Emanuel's, told me.

Emanuel has long since learned to balance his outsized personality, which has made him a subject of intrigue in Washington, with a compulsion for order, which makes him an effective manager. As a child, he attended a Jewish day school in Chicago, where students received written evaluations, instead of A's and B's. "My first-grade teacher," he told me, "said two things that were very interesting: 'Rahm likes to clean up after cleanup time is over.' " He pointed to his desk. "I am fastidious about it. In fact, this is messy today." The second point was about Emanuel's "personality being larger than life." In the first grade.



Besides Obama himself, Emanuel did the most to get the stimulus bill passed.

ROBERT RISKO

By any measure, what Obama's White House has achieved in passing the stimulus bill is historic. The last President to preside over a legislative victory of this magnitude so early in his Administration was Franklin Roosevelt, who on the sixth day of his Presidency persuaded Congress to enact a wholesale restructuring of the banking system. (That, too, is likely in the offing for the Obama team.) Yet praise for Obama was surprisingly grudging. Some liberal Democrats said that Emanuel and his team had made too many concessions to House Republicans, all of whom voted against the legislation. Meanwhile, conservatives complained that Obama had broken his pledge of bipartisan coöperation. Both arguments infuriated Emanuel, who spent hours on the Hill during the negotiations, arranged private meetings with Obama in the Oval Office for the Republican senators Susan Collins, Olympia Snowe, and Arlen Specter, whose votes were critical to the bill's passage, and personally haggled over the smallest spending details during a crucial evening of bargaining that lasted until the early morning.

"They have never worked the legislative process," Emanuel said of critics like the *Times* columnist Paul Krugman, who argued that Obama's concessions to Senate Republicans—in particular, the tax cuts, which will do little to stimulate the economy—produced a package that wasn't large enough to respond to the magnitude of the recession. "How many bills has he passed?"

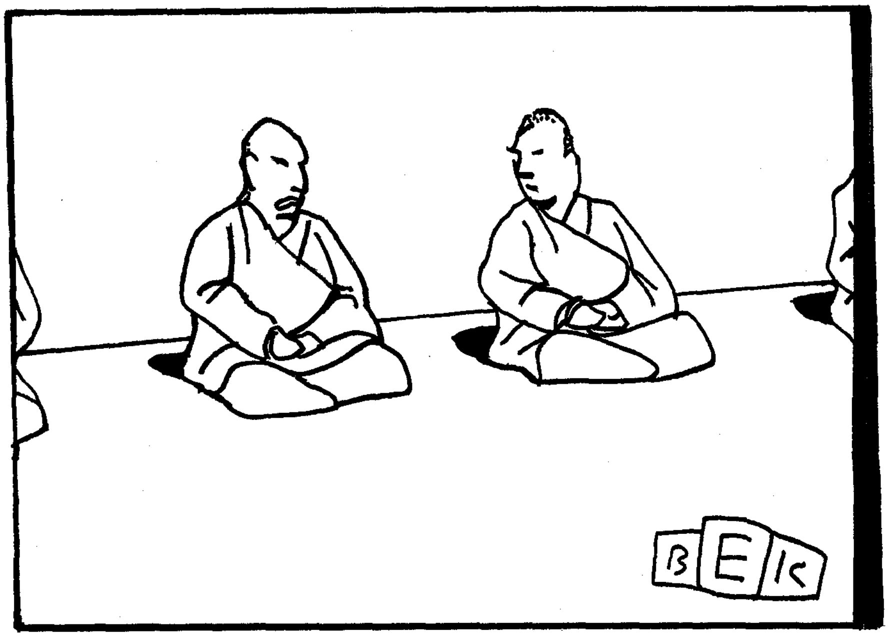
Emanuel has heard such complaints

before. As a senior aide in the Clinton White House, he successfully fought a Republican Congress to pass the State Children's Health Insurance Program (S-CHIP), which now provides health care for seven million kids. "I worked children's health care," he said. "President Clinton had pediatric care, eye, and dental, *inside* Medicaid. The Republicans had pediatric care, no eye and dental, *outside* of Medicaid. The deal Chris Jennings, Bruce Reed, and Rahm Emanuel cut for President Clinton was eye, dental, and pediatric, but the Republican way—outside of Medicaid. At that time, I was eviscerated by the left." He slammed his fist on the desk, his voice rising. "I had sold out! Today, who are the greatest defenders of kids' health care? The very people that opposed it when it passed," Emanuel said. "Back then, you'd have thought I was a whore! How could we do this outside of Medicaid? They warned that it had to be in Medicaid—not that they gave a rat's ass that the kid had eye or dental care. But, for getting it outside of Medicaid, we got kids' eye and dental care. O.K.? That was the swap. Now, my view is that Krugman as an economist is not wrong. But in the art of the possible, of the deal, he *is* wrong. He couldn't get his legislation."

The stimulus bill was essentially held hostage to the whims of Collins, Snowe, and Specter, but if Al Franken, the apparent winner of the disputed Minnesota Senate race, had been seated in Washington, and if Ted Kennedy, who is battling brain cancer, had been regularly available to vote, the White House would have needed only one Republican to pass the measure. "No disrespect to Paul Krugman," Emanuel went on, "but has he figured out how to seat the Minnesota senator?" (Franken's victory is the subject of an ongoing court challenge by his opponent, Norm Coleman, which the national Republican Party has been happy to help finance.) "Write a fucking column on how to seat the son of a bitch. I would be fascinated with that column. O.K.?" Emanuel stood up theatrically and gestured toward his seat with open palms. "Anytime they want, they can have it," he said of those who are critical of his legislative strategies. "I give them my chair."

His task has been made no easier by Obama's desire for bipartisanship, which Emanuel argues the press has misunderstood. "The public wants bipartisanship," he said. "We just have to *try*. We don't have to *succeed*." Still, he insisted, they have been succeeding. All Obama's other major accomplishments to date—winning approval for three hundred and fifty billion dollars in additional funding for the Troubled Asset Relief Program (TARP), passing the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act, expanding S-CHIP, signing an executive order to shutter the detention camp at Guantánamo Bay and a memorandum to increase the fuel efficiency of cars—were supported by at least some Republicans. The G.O.P., Emanuel said, decided that opposing the stimulus "was definitional, and I will make an argument to you, both on political and economic grounds: they will lose. I don't think the onus is on us. We tried. The story is they failed."

When Emanuel said this, I noticed that over his left shoulder, on the credenza behind him, was an official-looking name plate, which he said was a birthday present from his two brothers. It read, "Undersecretary for Go Fuck Yourself."



"I've never liked his stillness."

The office of chief of staff was created by Dwight Eisenhower, who redesigned the working structure of the White House along the hierarchal staff system he had learned as supreme commander of Allied forces in the Second World War. His chief of staff—though he didn't officially use the title, because Eisenhower worried that "politicians think it sounds too military"—was Sherman Adams, who accrued enormous influence, power, and enemies. Neither John F. Kennedy nor Lyndon Johnson had a chief of staff, and largely managed the White House themselves. Richard Nixon returned to Eisenhower's system and delegated vast managerial authority to H. R. Haldeman, the Watergate conspirator whose ironfisted management of the White House abetted Nixon's own self-destructive behavior in office. In reaction, both Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter tried to operate without chiefs of staff, but both men reversed course when the flat management structure of their respective White Houses produced staff disarray. Since Carter, every President has acknowledged the need for a strong chief of staff.

Over the years, some clear patterns about what kind of person succeeds in the job have emerged. James Pfiffner, a professor at George Mason University who has written extensively on the history of the office, cites four chiefs of staff as notable failures: Adams, Haldeman, Donald Regan, who was Ronald Reagan's second chief of staff, and John Sununu, George H. W. Bush's first chief of staff. "All of them got power-hungry, they alienated members of Congress, they alienated members of their own

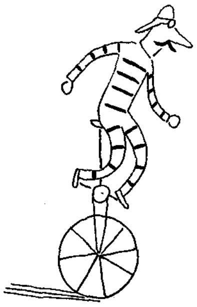
Administration, they had reputations for a lack of common civility, and they had hostile relations with the press. And each one of them resigned in disgrace and hurt their Presidents," Pfiffner said. "Being able to be firm and tough without being obnoxious and overbearing is crucial."

Emanuel's début as chief of staff featured him on the Hill making deals with lawmakers—politely and with due deference, by all accounts—but a chief of staff's primary job is to serve as the gatekeeper to the President, controlling the flow of information and people into the Oval Office. Constrict that flow too much and you deprive the President of opposing points of view; increase it too much and you drown him in extraneous detail and force him to arbitrate disputes better settled at a lower level. Emanuel saw both extremes in the Clinton White House. Clinton's first chief of staff, Thomas (Mack) McLarty, a childhood friend from Arkansas, was known as Mack the Nice, and under his leadership the White House was chaotic. Leon Panetta, who is now Obama's C.I.A. director and, like Emanuel, was a congressman, took over from McLarty. Arguably, he overcompensated for McLarty's laxness, limiting access to the President so drastically that Clinton surreptitiously sought counsel outside the channels that Panetta controlled. "The President set up a parallel White House, led by Dick Morris, while Leon was chief of staff," a former senior Clinton White House official told me. "If you clamp down too tight the principal says, 'You're not letting me have access to the people and the information I really want, so I'm just going to go build some other structure.' "

Obama's managerial instincts tend toward a looser operation, with lots of staff and outside input. The fact that he will keep a BlackBerry to stay in touch with friends outside the West Wing fishbowl is one sign of this. (Emanuel grimaced when I mentioned his boss's devotion to the device.) But early in his Senate career Obama also learned the perils of not having one strong manager in charge. When he arrived in Washington, in 2005, he told one of his senior aides, "*My vision of this is having six* smart people sitting around the table batting ideas around." A month and a half later, tensions erupted between Obama's Chicago staff and his Washington staff, making it difficult for them to agree on his schedule. Obama was frustrated that no single person was able to make decisions. The aide reminded him, "Don't you remember: 'six smart people sitting around the table'?" Obama replied, "Oh, that was six weeks ago. I'm not on that now."

Emanuel's task will be further complicated by what is a fairly top-heavy White House. David Axelrod, Obama's longtime political strategist, Valerie Jarrett, a close friend and counsellor, and Pete Rouse, Obama's Senate chief of staff, are "senior advisers," a title that in the White House denotes a special place at the top of the hierarchy. Part of Emanuel's job will be to stitch Obama's old campaign hands together with powerful new figures on the policy side, such as Summers—"a dominating personality," according to a senior White House official—and James L. Jones, a retired four-star general and Obama's national-security adviser. In addition, Obama has created four new policy czars at the White House—for health care, energy, Native American affairs, and urban affairs—making the West Wing a more crowded place. Meanwhile, Vice-President Joseph Biden has been promised a high-level role in decision-making. Joshua Bolten, George W. Bush's last chief of staff, told me that Emanuel has "the challenge of fitting a lot of large personalities and brains and portfolios into a relatively small space."

Perhaps Emanuel's greatest challenge, however, will be making the adjustment from being a prominent elected official to being a staffer. Bolten, who hosted Emanuel and eleven former chiefs of staff for breakfast at the White House in December, said, "One of the interesting bits of advice that emerged from the breakfast was that you probably shouldn't be a political principal yourself. You need to put aside your own personality and profile and adopt one that serves your boss. I'm not saying you necessarily have to have a low profile, but it can't really be your own independent profile. It's got to be the profile your boss wants reflected, and it has to be a profile that does not compete with the rest of the Cabinet." Emanuel said that he has thought about that advice. "There's no doubt" that this is an issue, he told me. "There are pluses to who I was and what I was and there are perils to who I was and what I was, and you've got to be conscious of them."



David Axelrod is one of Emanuel's best friends. (When Emanuel got married, to Amy Rule, Axelrod signed the *ketubah*, the traditional Jewish marriage contract.) The two men met in 1982, when Emanuel was a spokesman for a Naderite group called the Illinois Public Action Council and Axelrod was a reporter for the Chicago *Tribune*. Emanuel's organization had just helped elect Lane Evans as the first Democratic representative from western Illinois in many years, and Emanuel was eager to get Axelrod to write about it. "He was just relentless," Axelrod told me recently. "Rahm chased me down to the recovery room after my second child was born. He says, 'What is it, a boy or a girl?' I said, 'It's a boy.' He said, 'Mazel tov,' and then a little pause. Then he says, 'When do you think you'll be back at work?' "

Emanuel and Axelrod crossed paths again in 1984, when Axelrod left journalism to run Paul Simon's Illinois Senate campaign and Emanuel worked as a junior fund-raiser and field organizer for Simon. By 1988, Emanuel was a top staffer at the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, or D.C.C.C. (the same organization that he ran as a congressman seventeen years later). "I did campaigns in '86 and '88 for him and with him," Axelrod said. "Including the famous dead-fish race."

More than any other story about Emanuel's tactics—and there are lots of them—the tale of the "dead-fish race" came to define his public persona as a Democratic operative. He and Axelrod were working for David Swarts, a Democratic official from Erie County, New York, running an underfunded campaign for a congressional seat long held by Republicans. "We were rolling the dice on the race, just spending the money we had as it came in to try and get these numbers up," Axelrod said. Their plan was to take a poll at the end of the contest which they hoped would show a competitive race and then use the results to help raise last-minute funds and overtake their opponent.

"The poll came back a week or two before the end, and it said we were down by seventeen," Axelrod said. "And that was it." According to Axelrod, Swarts's campaign manager later studied the poll's findings and concluded that the pollster had botched the analysis: the survey showed that Swarts was just five or six points behind. (The pollster says that the error was actually minor and quickly caught.) Axelrod added, "Had we gotten that correct poll then, we would have put our foot to the pedal. But it was too late. So Rahm, being as invested as he was in the thing, expressed himself as only Rahm can." After the election, Emanuel and his colleagues hired a Massachusetts company called Enough Is Enough, which specialized in "creative revenge," to send the pollster a box with a dead fish inside. Emanuel laughed mischievously when I asked him about the prank. "We had our choice of animals," he said.

When Emanuel is in Washington, he stays in the basement of the Capitol Hill home of Representative Rosa DeLauro, of Connecticut, and her husband, the pollster Stanley Greenberg, an old friend. ("It's part of my workout room," Greenberg said recently of the accommodations. "He walks out of his bedroom into where I work out.") Greenberg argues that Emanuel's antics have been integral to his success. "Understand that the caricature and the mythology have always been helpful," Greenberg said. "Sending the fish to the pollster that he thought had failed sent a message about how public he can be about his displeasure, and showed that he's willing to step beyond the normal bounds, that he's willing to be outrageous and he doesn't suffer fools. He doesn't mind bad publicity. It's part of his cachet, it's part of why he's able to be effective."

Emanuel has succeeded in almost every professional endeavor he has undertaken. In Chicago, in 1989 and 1991, he raised money for the successful mayoral campaigns of Richard M. Daley, and this caught the attention of Bill Clinton's campaign, which hired him. Emanuel then raised a record amount of money for Clinton, which kept his Presidential campaign from collapsing during the darkest days of the primaries, when he was fighting allegations of adultery and draft-dodging. In the Clinton White House, after a brief setback—he was demoted after clashing with Hillary Clinton—Emanuel rose to become a top adviser to Bill Clinton, securing for himself the small but coveted office next to the President's private study, the office that Axelrod now occupies. When Emanuel left the Clinton Administration, in 1998, he moved back to Chicago, took a job as an investment banker, and in less than three years earned nearly twenty million dollars. In 2002, he won a congressional seat in the city on his first attempt. Three years later, he took over the D.C.C.C., and, more than anyone else, was responsible for restoring Democrats to power the following year. (Not a single Democratic incumbent lost in the general election.) By the time Obama came calling for a chief of staff, Emanuel was the Democratic Caucus chair, making him fourth in the House leadership, and on a path to becoming Speaker.

Obama settled on Emanuel as early as last August. "It was months before the election when Barack said to me, 'You know, Rahm would make a great chief of staff,'" Axelrod said. "He spent six years in the White House, knows this place inside and out, spent four or five years in Congress, and became a leader in a short period of time. He really understands the legislative process, he's a friend who the President has known for a long time from Chicago, and whose loyalty is beyond question, and who thinks like a Chicagoan."

Emanuel did not want the job. A few months before Election Day, Obama sent him an e-mail, with a warning: "Heads up, I'm coming for you." Emanuel was a key negotiator in moving the TARP legislation through Congress, in October. After the bill cleared Congress, Obama, who supported it, sent Emanuel another e-mail. "I told you we made a great team," he said. Emanuel wrote back, "I look forward to being your floor leader in the House."

While Obama was wooing Rahm, Rahm's older brother, Ezekiel, an oncologist and a bioethicist, served as a sounding board. "I probably spent half an hour every day being screamed at on the telephone by him," he said. " 'I don't want to do this. Why do I have to do this? Tell me I don't have to do this.' All of which said to me he knew he had to do it." (Ezekiel told me that the rivalry among himself, Rahm, and their third brother, Ariel, a Hollywood agent who is the basis for the Ari Gold character on HBO's "Entourage," was so intense that they had to pursue careers in different cities. "We couldn't possibly be within a thousand miles of each other, because the force fields just wouldn't let it happen," Ezekiel said. Rahm is now his boss; he works at the White House as an adviser to the budget director on health policy.)

Over lunch two days before the Inauguration, Emanuel explained to me his decision to give up his congressional seat and return to the White House. We were in a brasserie in the lobby of a Washington hotel, and Emanuel, dressed in a black sweater over a white button-down, was frequently interrupted by people who wanted to wish him well or have their picture taken with him. "The main hesitation was family, because there's no way you will convince me this is good for my family," Emanuel, who has three children, ages eleven, ten, and eight, said. "No matter what every White House says—'We're going to be great, family-friendly'—well, the only family we're going to be good for is the First Family. Everybody else is, like, really a distant second, O.K.?"

Then there was the issue of his congressional ambition. In 2005, when Obama first arrived in Washington, he and Emanuel had dinner and discussed their futures. "He knew what I wanted to do, I knew what he wanted to do," Emanuel told me. "He was going to be President one day, and I was going to run for Speaker. It was not that he was deciding on 2008 but his course was one day he was going to run for President." For Emanuel, being chief of staff meant abandoning his goal. "I was putting together the pieces of my puzzle for Speaker," he said. "I'd been to the White House—that was a dream, but I'd been there. Now I was on to another dream and professional goal and career. And so I had to give that up." He added, "I had my own personal desire of being the first Jewish Speaker. That's why I took on the D.C.C.C. job, that's why I ran for Caucus chair, that's why I stayed involved."

Emanuel grew up in a political family. His Israeli-born father, Benjamin, was a member of the Irgun, a militant Zionist group from which the modern Likud Party eventually emerged. His mother, Marsha, was a civil-rights activist who was arrested several times. "We were attacked because we were white Jews with African-Americans," Ezekiel said. When Martin Luther King, Jr., marched in Chicago in 1966, and was pelted with eggs, Marsha and her children marched along with him. Ezekiel told me that he knew Rahm would take the job of chief of staff because of Marsha's father, Herman Smulivitz, a boxer and a union organizer. It was Herman who instilled in Rahm a commitment to service, and Rahm was particularly close to him.

When I asked Rahm about his grandfather, his eyes welled up with tears. "I'm a little too tired, a little too stressed," he said. "It's too emotional about Gramp." He poured himself a glass of water and took a sip. Earlier, he had explained his decision in pragmatic terms: "If you got into public life to affect policy, and to affect the direction of the country, where could you do that on the most immediate basis? Everybody knows: chief of staff."

Obama's decision to hire Emanuel says two things about his Presidency. First, like his decision to make Biden, an expert in foreign policy, his running mate, it shows that he is honest enough about what he doesn't know to try to fill in the gaps in his own experience. There are people working for Obama who know as much as Emanuel does about the legislative process, and others who know as much as he does about running the White House, but there isn't anybody who knows as much about both. Obama's choice also says a great deal about the ethos of his White House. He recently characterized his team as a group of "mechanics," which suggests an emphasis not on ideology but on details and problem-solving. In the Clinton White House, Emanuel's specialty was helping to pass legislation that required centrist coalitions, like NAFTA, a crime bill, and welfare reform. "He's a partisan in the sense that he's a strong Democrat, but he's not an ideological Democrat," Stanley Greenberg said. "He's not ideologically liberal. He comes out of Chicago politics, which is more transactional."

"If I can't feel love, what was the point of making me so damn good-looking?"

• •

During the Senate negotiations, Obama agreed to pare back his tax cut for workers, from five hundred dollars to four hundred dollars. It was Emanuel's job to sell the decision to House Democrats. "Nancy was opposed to it," he told me, referring to Nancy Pelosi, the Speaker of the House, who asked him why he would put the President's tax cut on the table. "I said, 'Because at the end of the day the President believes we have to get this done.' " Emanuel thinks that the stimulus bill speaks for itself: "It is the most progressive tax bill in the history of the United States, bar none, by a quotient of two."

Emanuel laughed as he recounted the final sticking point in the negotiations. It was not, as many people have thought, an argument between the five centrist senators—Ben Nelson, Joe Lieberman, Collins, Snowe, and Specter—and the House but a debate among the centrists themselves. The dispute was over a formula for how Medicaid funds in the bill would be allocated to the states. In the House version of the legislation, fifty per cent of the funds would go to all states and fifty per cent would go to states with high unemployment. In the Senate, where rural interests are more dominant, the formula was 80-20. A deal had been reached between the two chambers to split the difference and make the formula 65-35. "Everybody signed except for Ben Nelson," Emanuel said. "He wants 72-28, or seventy-two and a half, and he says, 'I'm not signing this deal.' Specter says, 'Well, I am not agreeing with you.' " Without Nelson, Collins wasn't likely to vote for the deal, either.

"Collins and Snowe are kind of like, at this point, looking at their shoes," Emanuel went on, "because Specter says, 'Well, why make it seventy-two? What do you mean? We all have it at sixty-five, in the middle.' " Emanuel politely declared that the formula would stay at 65-35. He then asked Nelson to step out of the room with him. After a brief conversation in the hallway, they returned, and Nelson agreed to the stimulus package.

Emanuel stood up and removed his tie as he finished the story, making it clear that he was ready to leave for the airport. He seemed more cheerful, knowing that he was that much closer to seeing his family. I asked him what he promised Nelson to persuade him to drop his objections. Emanuel just smiled. "Everything is going to be O.K.," he said, in a mock-soothing voice. "America is going to be a great place." ♦

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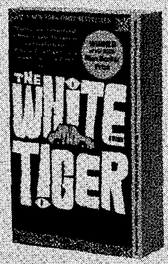

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AMERICAN CHRONICLES

LESBIAN NATION

When gay women took to the road.

BY ARIEL LEVY

There was a time, briefly, when women ruled the world. Well, their world, anyway. In the late nineteen-seventies, several thousand women in North America decided not to concern themselves with equal pay for equal work, or getting their husbands to do the dishes, or convincing their boyfriends that there was such a thing as a clitoris. Why capitulate, why compromise, when you could separate, live in a world of your own invention? On the fringes, utopian separatists have been part of the American story since at least the early eighteenth century—the Shakers, in New England; the millennial Rappites, in Pennsylvania; the Oneida Perfectionists, in upstate New York—and these women decided to turn away from a world in which female inferiority was enforced by culture and law. Better to establish their own farms and towns, better to live only among women. This required dispensing with heterosexuality, but many of these women were gay, and, for the rest, it seemed like a reasonable price to pay for real independence.

The lesbian separatists of a generation ago created a shadow society devoted to living in an alternate, penisless reality. There were many factions: the Gutter Dykes, in Berkeley; the Gorgons, in Seattle; several hundred Radicalesbians, in New York City, along with the smaller CLIT Collective; the Furies, in Washington, D.C.; and the Separatists Enraged Proud and Strong (SEPS), in San Francisco. There were outposts of Women's Land all over the United States and Canada—places owned by women where all women, and only women, were welcome. "Only women on the land" was the catchphrase used by separatists to indicate that men, even male children, were banned from Women's Land (and they often spelled it "wimmin" or "womyn," in an attempt to keep men out of their words as well as their worlds). Separatists were aiming for complete autonomy, and to that end there were separatist food co-ops—such as the memorably named New York Lesbian Food Conspiracy—separatist publishing houses, and separatist credit unions. "We will soon be able to integrate the pieces of our lives and stop this schizophrenic existence of a straight job by day and radical political work at night," Nancy Groschwitz wrote in a 1979 treatise called "Practical Economics for a Women's Community." Perhaps the most successful separatist venture was the women's-music-festival circuit, with its offshoot, Olivia Records, started in 1973. (Since the early nineteen-nineties, Olivia has concentrated on the lesbian cruise and resort business.)

"The template for this idea of separatism is black separatism," Todd Gitlin, a sociology professor at Columbia University and the author of "The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage," said. "The coverage of the Nation of Islam gained enormous traction with Malcolm X. Via him, separatism was in the air. Run a few years ahead and more people were estranged from normalcy—and normalcy was looking crazier because of the Vietnam War. The appeal of separatism is compounded. You have all kinds of versions of this; various forms of unplugging."

There is no reliable record of how many women were calling themselves lesbian separatists at the height of the movement. "I think it's quite impossible to say, other than thousands," Lillian Faderman, the author of six books on lesbian history, said. Different groups had different definitions of separatism, ranging from a refusal to associate with men to a refusal to associate with straight women to a refusal to associate with gay women who weren't separatists.

The most colorful separatists, although they were neither the most influential nor the most ideologically stalwart, were the Van Dykes, a roving band of van-driving vegans who shaved their heads, avoided speaking to men unless they were waiters or mechanics, and lived on the highways of North America for several years, stopping only on Women's Land. The Van Dykes had determined that the world was suffering from "testosterone poisoning," and they were on a quest: to locate dyke heaven.

They were kind of serious about this, but they were kind of kidding. Or they were completely serious, but they knew it was funny. (They were radical but silly.) When the founding Van Dykes, Heather Elizabeth and Ange Spaulding, first hit the road, in 1977, they wrote a recruitment song to the tune of "Mr. Sandman":

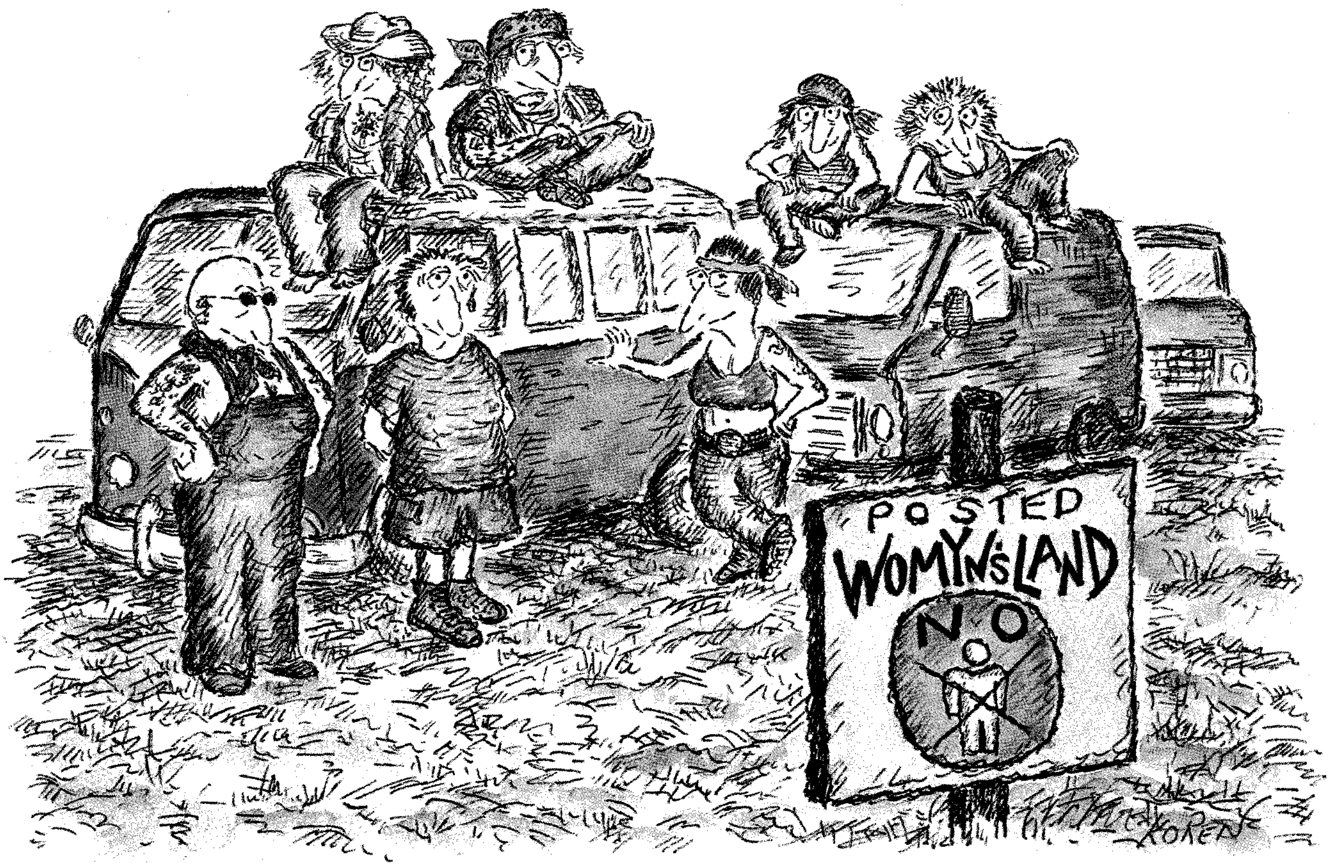
Would-be Van Dykes
bring us your dreams
make them the clearest that they've ever
  been
give us a sign, like nickels and dollars
and tell us that it's just a matter of hours
till we find our
land in the sun
with killer dykes there, all having real fun
plantin' grains and hoeing beans
please turn on and cook up some schemes!

It was ironic that Heather Elizabeth was singing about the joys of agriculture when, actually, she had just abandoned that life and a previous girlfriend, a woman named Chris Fox. In 1976, Heather, Chris, and another lesbian couple had bought a crumbling farm seventy miles outside Toronto, imagining that they'd create a thriving patch of Women's Land where they could live by their own principles and grow their own vegetables. They had fantasies of gardening naked in the sunshine. Instead, the snow was so high it reached the windowsills. The snowplow passed only once every three days. They had intermittent electricity and meagre insulation. Life was icy and miserable. On a trip into Toronto for supplies in the early spring, Heather ran into Ange Spaulding, who was glowing and tan after almost a year of living out of her van in warm places. Ange talked about the anonymity and freedom of life on the road. In Mexico, she said, you could live off the fruit you picked along the roadside. Within a few hours, Heather decided to leave Chris and their freezing, female-only farm behind.

Heather Elizabeth and Ange Spaulding became the first two Van Dykes. Ange would be Brook Van Dyke, because she was loquacious: a babbling Brook. Heather took the last name she has to this day. By the time she was twenty-nine, Heather had changed her surname three times, once for each of her ex-husbands. She didn't want any of their names anymore, and she didn't want her father's name, either. Like her contemporaries Malcolm X and Muhammad Ali, Heather wanted a name that reflected her emancipation, not a reminder of a past as chattel.

Van Dyke was perfect. Not only was it accurate—they were, after all, dykes who lived in a van—but it had grand potential. Perhaps they could persuade every lesbian in America, in Canada, in the entire world, to cast off the slave name she'd been given at birth or taken at the altar in favor of this tough-sounding moniker that proclaimed, "Your eyes do not deceive you: I am a real live lesbian." They had a fantasy that a maître d' somewhere would one day call out, "Van Dyke, party of four?" and dozens of lesbians would stand up, to the horror of the assembled heterosexuals.

Anything seemed possible. This was 1977, less than a decade after the Stonewall riots, in New York, which had



Lesbianism in the seventies promised a life of radical empowerment, and women were drawn by ideology as well as by desire.

EDWARD KOREN

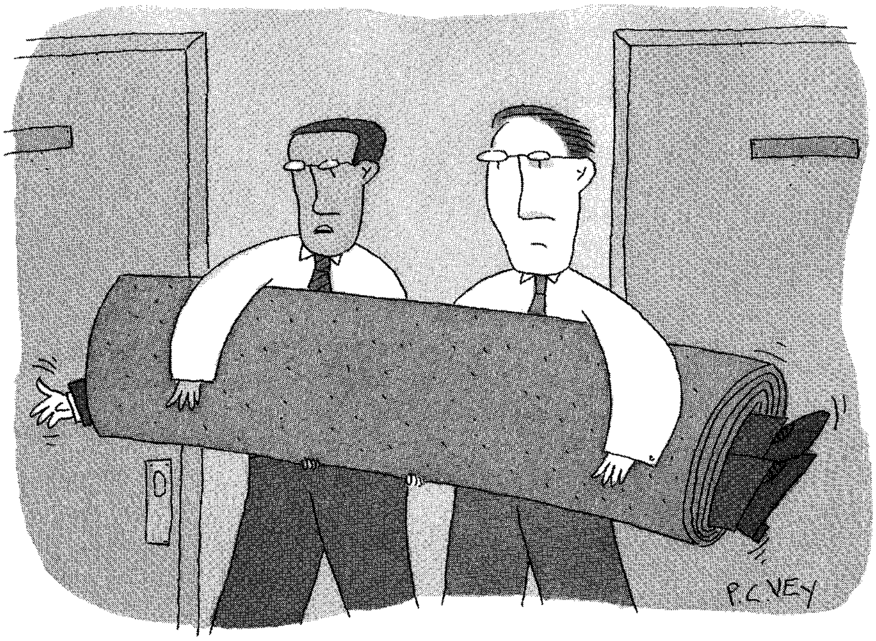
marked the rise of the gay-rights movement in America. Any sense of gay life as normal life was relatively new and still flimsy. Until 1961, there were sodomy laws in every state, which made gay sex illegal. The American Psychiatric Association did not remove homosexuality from its list of mental disorders until 1973. (Previously, despite Freud's belief that homosexuality could not be "cured," there had been a robust industry in the treatment of lesbianism as an ailment. According to a psychoanalyst quoted in *Time* in 1956, ninety per cent of homosexuals could be healed—and should be, because there were no "healthy homosexuals.")

But now lesbianism had been transformed from a criminal activity practiced by the mentally ill into a radical political gesture embraced by the women's movement. In her book "In Our Time: Memoir of a Revolution," the feminist Susan Brownmiller describes a "coming-out fervor akin to a tidal wave": "I was bewildered by the overnight conversions and sudden switches in overt orientation by many of the activists I knew." Many feminists who weren't even particularly attracted to women were drawn to lesbianism, convinced that it was "not a matter of sexual preference, but rather one of political choice which every woman must make if she is to become woman-identified and thereby end male supremacy," according to the début issue of *The Furies*, a publication put out by the separatist collective of the same name.

The feminist Ti-Grace Atkinson went so far as to claim that her brand of celibate "political lesbianism" was morally superior to the sexually active version practiced in her midst. Atkinson was not alone in this martyred line of reasoning; a 1975 essay by the separatist Barbara Lipschutz entitled "Nobody Needs to Get Fucked" urged women to "free the libido from the tyranny of orgasm-seeking. Sometimes hugging is nicer." This argument was never particularly compelling to the lesbians in the movement who were actually gay.

Lesbianism—or the pretense of lesbianism—became so pervasive that Betty Friedan notoriously labelled it the "lavender menace." In a 1973 article in the *Times Magazine*, she suggested that the C.I.A. had sent female homosexuals to infiltrate the women's movement as part of a plot to discredit it. Friedan was right in one way: the Van Dykes and their separatist comrades had ideas that made those of the National Organization for Women look like an appeasement policy.

Lesbianism in the seventies promised its practitioners a life of radical rebellion and feminist empowerment. Separatism was supposed to be an antidote to all the altruism that women had been afflicted with since time immemorial. Now, when the phrase "lesbian mom" is a commonplace, it's hard to imagine a time when female homosexuality was imbued with a countercultural connotation so potent that women were drawn to it by ideology rather than by desire. Similarly, if you are a young gay woman today, it can be difficult to understand the idea of organizing your entire existence around your sexual preference.



"I'd be upset, too, if they replaced my golden parachute with a dirty rolled-up carpet."

The first time I laid eyes on the last of the Van Dykes, I knew it was her before we exchanged a word. She looked like Johnny Cash but bigger, tougher, sitting in a leather jacket at the back of a bookstore in Seattle, where she has lived since she pulled into town in her van in 1980, fed up with driving, non-monogamy, communal assets, radical feminism, and the name Heather. As a child, she used to say, "I'm Hedy Lamarr, the movie star!," over and over, because she'd heard the name somewhere and liked the sound of it. She told that story to a woman named Bear when she first got to town, and Bear said, "Your name is Lamar." She has been Lamar Van Dyke ever since.

Van Dyke is an unusually large woman. People often stare at her on the street. She isn't fat, but she's built broad and stands six feet tall. She has an imposing presence. "If you look at me, there's no question about it: I'm a dyke. I am gay," she said. "If you don't think so, there is something really wrong with you." She has short, dark hair and tattoos winding up and down both arms, some of which she made herself during the eighteen years she owned and ran a tattoo parlor. I was nervous when I met her.

If I weren't female and gay, I doubt very much that she would have spoken to me. "Your generation wants to fit in," she said. "That's your deal: I want to be just like you. The last thing I want to be is just like you." Nevertheless, Van Dyke took me back to her house, which has a metal placard that says "LADIES" on the front door and is decorated with neon tubing, bowling balls, paintings she made of bird-people, Chinese lanterns, an old-fashioned barber's chair, a large purple crystal geode with a crown on top, and a huge sculpture of a kimono that she fashioned out of scrap metal after she envisioned it in a dream. "One time, my mom looked at me and said, 'I just don't understand how you ended up the way you ended up—you're just so flamboyant!' " Van Dyke said, sitting on a leopard-print couch in her living room. "I said, 'Mom! Who dressed me up when I was three years old and gave me a Tonette and had me sing little songs for her friends at her parties? Who wanted me to be Shirley Temple? Who took me to tap-dancing classes? What do you mean, you don't understand? What's wrong with you?' And she just started laughing."

Lamar Van Dyke was born Heather Elizabeth Nelson in Canada in 1947, and grew up in Buffalo, New York. Her mother was a homemaker and her stepfather, a pipe fitter, "was a very staunch, German, patriarchal guy who said, 'You will not do this, you will not do that, you will not leave the house.' We were totally at war the whole time I was a teen-ager. It was some kind of Freudian thing: I grew breasts and he lost his mind."

At nineteen, she left home. She got pregnant after a one-night stand with a Black Panther named Arnell, and went to San Francisco, where the weather was warmer and the culture was looser, to have her baby—a girl, whom she put up for adoption. "I didn't really have a lot of qualms about that," Van Dyke said. "I'd helped my sister raise her kids, so I knew what was involved and I knew I couldn't do that. It's like, no: this child's going to have a good life and she's got to have it someplace else."

Heather got married three times in the six years after she gave birth. She met husband No. 1 while she was still in the maternity ward, where he had come to visit another woman. But Heather decided, "I'll have him, I'll take him." He was a psychiatrist running a halfway house for ex-convicts, and Heather stayed there with him for about six months. On a visit home to Buffalo, she met up with husband No. 2, a biker named Skip Broome, who was a member of a gang called the Road Vultures. She showed me a faded newspaper clipping from 1968, picturing her with long brown hair, standing with Broome and his motorcycle, both of them looking gleeful and wild. (Broome was eventually imprisoned for selling pot and ended up in Attica during the riots.) In those early relationships, Van Dyke said, "It was about the thrill of catching them. It was the thrill of 'Hey, you look good. I wonder if I can get you.' Well, *yeah*. That'd be yeah. I mean, men'll stick it in central vacuuming."

Husband No. 3, Bruce Beyer, was a draft resister and a member of the Buffalo Nine, a group of antiwar protesters who were arrested when thirty-two F.B.I. agents and U.S. marshals stormed their demonstration at a Unitarian church. Beyer was facing serious jail time, so he and Heather fled to Stockholm, where they were married in 1972. "No. 3 was about the adventure and hiding out from the F.B.I. and running around the world using fake names and crossing borders," Van Dyke said. "I was up for that. I thought that was really good."

That spring, a young woman from New Mexico who looked like Faye Dunaway in "Bonnie and Clyde" came to stay with the Beyers in Stockholm; she was there to attend an international women's conference. Heather decided to go along. She was exhilarated by the brand of radical feminism espoused by the women at the conference, and one idea in particular appealed to her: that you didn't need a man. That you could be the protagonist in your life, the adventurer at the center of the story. According to these feminists, the ultimate enactment of this new kind of power was to have sex with other women. Heather and her house guest left the conference eager to try. Bruce Beyer gamely suggested that he might play a role in their experiment, but the proposal was unpopular. "I said, 'Uh-uh. She's sleeping with me. You're on the couch,' " Van Dyke said. She has a big, mad, raucous laugh. " 'For the *rest of our lives*, you are on the couch!' "

Beyer, who is now a carpenter living in Buffalo, told me, "I remember being in the other room going, Um, I'm not so sure I like this. Getting up and walking around and around this park at four in the morning." For his wife, lesbian sex was a revelation—her new favorite thing about being alive. A few nights later, Heather brought home a pack of "man-hating dykes from England," as she put it, and it dawned on Beyer that his wife had new priorities. "But at that time in history the mandate in the antiwar movement was to support women who were

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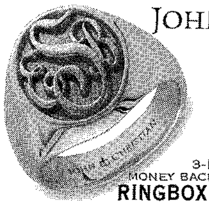

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trying to find their voice," he said. "I don't mean to sound heroic about it, but that's the way it went down." He added, "I always thought of Heather as the Merry Prankster of the women's movement—she brought a levity to everything. I really had my heart broken."

Heather made her way to Toronto, where she'd heard that there were lots of lesbians, and quickly moved in with a couple who were publishing a women's newspaper and experimenting with separatism and "smashing monogamy." Promiscuity "was our final act of war resistance," Van Dyke said, laughing. "We just wanted to not accept anything as fact and to establish what was real for our own selves about absolutely everything. We want to have relationships where we expand! And everything is wonderful! So we're just going to let anybody do whatever they want to do whenever they want to do it, and, you know, there's a certain freedom to that. And there's quite a bit of drama. When the Van Dykes were running around, everybody was sleeping with everybody. It was chaos."

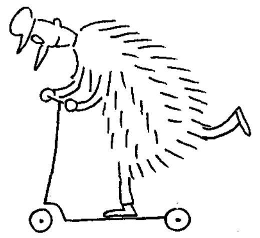
As divorced from men and the heterosexual counterculture as separatists considered themselves to be, they did share certain generational tendencies. "It's so weird that people talk about feminism being anti-sex—as if. As if!" said Chris Fox, who once owned that frostbound farm with Heather and is now pursuing a doctorate in English at the University of Victoria. "People were fucking their brains out."

Heather Van Dyke, for example, had a knack for getting women to fall in love with her. Almost as impressive, she usually managed to keep them as her friends and sometime lovers even after she had moved on. Some of this loyalty had to do with Heather's seductive personal power. She expresses ideas that are technically insane with so much vigor that you find yourself thinking, Well, *maybe*. . . . She was a model as a teen-ager, and, with her shaved head in her nineteen-seventies incarnation, was stunning in an otherworldly way. But she also shared with her girlfriends a sense that liberated women did not limit themselves when it came to love.

In 1978, after a year on the road with Ange Spaulding, Heather returned to Canada to sell her share of the farm. On this trip, she found a new girlfriend, Judith. But what Heather really wanted was to be on the road—not so much with a partner as with a pack. The dramatic potential of a van gang appealed to Judith, and she enlisted her friend Nancy, a woman who was just getting out of a bad marriage. Nancy wanted to share the spoils of her divorce with other women and experiment with a new way of life. She quickly transformed from Nancy, a heterosexual with children, into Sky Van Dyke, a lesbian separatist with a van.

The Van Dykes decided that they would meet in Texas and then head to Mexico. Heather was convinced that they would be able to figure out how to locate or create dyke heaven if they would just contemplate the matter on top of some pyramids. Heather would take Judith, Sky would go on her own, and they would send gas money to Chris Fox and Ange Spaulding, who agreed to drive together, even though Chris had been hurt by Heather's departure from the farm, she says, "when Ange showed up with a tan, smoking cigarettes in her sexy way." Chris and Ange did not think of themselves as jilted lovers following their ex-girlfriend on a road trip. They were convinced that their shared struggle to dispense with the straight world outweighed their bruised egos and broken hearts. "Ange and I melded a little over Heather not being with either of us," Chris Fox says. (Chris changed her name to Thorn Van Dyke, because she was prickly.) "I packed up my carpenter tools and I was ready to head off with Ange, not as her lover but as a friend. As a Van Dyke, as it were."

Several months later, Heather Van Dyke sat on the steps of the San Antonio city hall with her new girlfriend (Judith Van Dyke) and watched in awe as her two previous lovers, Thorn Van Dyke and Brook Van Dyke, rolled into town followed by their benefactress, Sky Van Dyke, and a woman she'd picked up along the way—Birch Van Dyke. There were



WAITING AND FINDING

While he was in kindergarten, everybody wanted to play
the tomtoms when it came time for that. You had to
run in order to get there first, and he would not.
So he always had a triangle. He does not remember
how they played the tomtoms, but he sees clearly
their Chinese look. Red with dragons front and back
and gold studs around that held the drumhead tight.
If you had a triangle, you didn't really make music.
You mostly waited while the tambourines and tomtoms
went on a long time. Until there was a signal for all
triangle people to hit them the right way. Usually once.
Then it was tomtoms and waiting some more. But what
he remembers is the sound of the triangle. A perfect,
shimmering sound that has lasted all his long life.
Fading out and coming again after a while. Getting lost
and the waiting for it to come again. Waiting meaning
without things. Meaning love sometimes dying out,
sometimes being taken away. Meaning that often he lives
silent in the middle of the world's music. Waiting
for the best to come again. Beginning to hear the silence
as he waits. Beginning to like the silence maybe too much.

—*Jack Gilbert*

no cell phones then, and no e-mail. It was remarkable that they'd all materialized—"An Affair to Remember" with radical lesbians.

On New Year's Day, 1979, six Van Dykes drove four vans across the Mexican border and headed south, toward the Yucátan Peninsula. When they got to Chichén Itzá, the women climbed a crumbling ziggurat, took one look at the stone altar on top with its charred marks, and became convinced that they had happened upon a site where women had once been sacrificed. "They were clearly burning women," Lamar Van Dyke says. The Van Dykes ran down the steps, got in their vans, and drove away.

Technically, the Van Dykes weren't high, but they were living off the fruit they found in the trees, so there was a general light-headedness in the group. Occasionally, they would camp out in a park and boil a pot of soybeans down to a little piece of tofu or fry up some *soysage as a vegan treat. Even thirty years* later, the woman who was once Heather refuses to call herself the Van Dykes' leader—hierarchy was considered patriarchal—but she did have a catalytic effect on the group. "I had slept with them all except for Sky, so, if things were going to happen, they would somehow come at me," Van Dyke said. "You know how you can say things to somebody you've slept with in a way you can't say things to somebody else? Well, I could do that with most of them. They had relationships with each other, but they weren't as intimate." And, in this world of women, intimacy was currency.

In Cozumel, the Van Dykes found themselves adopted by a local woman named Paloma, who ran a jewelry store and had a closeted lover in Mexico City. Paloma had a big house with a thatched roof on the edge of town, steps from the ocean. The Van Dykes thought that maybe they had found their ideal destination, and camped out there for weeks. "We taught ourselves very important phrases, like *Los hombres son puercos*," Van Dyke recalls. "We didn't want to call anybody a motherfucker, because that would of course be wishing something horrible on a woman, so we decided the thing to say would be 'Go fuck your father.' I think it's *Chinga su padre*—it's not a phrase that they use."

One morning, the Van Dykes woke at six to find themselves surrounded by Mexican police. The charges were unclear, but the Van Dykes were escorted to the station, where they waited for hours. "Finally, the police said it had come to their attention that we were acting in ways they didn't really welcome," Van Dyke said. "We're not good for their environment."

There was an intra-Van Dyke battle when Brook attempted to steer the group to Belize, but Heather prevailed, as usual, and the Van Dykes wound their way back through the United States. "We were everywhere," Van Dyke says. "We found Women's Land in North Carolina, Florida, Texas, Arkansas, New Mexico, Arizona, a lot of Women's Land in California and Oregon. You could actually go all around the country from Women's Land to Women's Land and you met all these other women who were doing the same thing. You would run into people in New Mexico that you had seen in Texas. . . . It was a whole world." It was the Lesbian Nation.

During yet another fight among the Van Dykes over who was sleeping with whom, Heather recalls, Judith left in a huff and caught a ride to San Francisco. There she met the sex radicals Pat Califia and Gayle Rubin, who had started a lesbian sadomasochist group that they called Samois, for the house of torture in "The Story of O." "She hooked up with those women and when she came back she said, 'You're going to love this,' " Van Dyke remembers. Judith was not mistaken: tofu quickly gave way to leather in the vans. The Van Dykes loved the drama of sadomasochism, the way it gave them license to play power games—which, really, they had been engaged in all along. For Heather Van Dyke, who had been a kind of lesbian Joseph Smith, driving around the continent looking for the promised land with a band of wives and ex-wives and future wives in tow, the idea of being explicitly dominant—a top, in the parlance of sadomasochism—was particularly appealing.

Characteristically, what was going on among the Van Dykes was indicative of what was going on in the women's movement at large. In "In Our Time," Susan Brownmiller writes about a phone call that she received in 1981 from the German feminist Alice Schwarzer:

> She seemed to be saying that someone named Pat Califia, a pornography writer in California, was launching an important new feminist movement. . . .
>
> "What's the new movement?" I inquired with interest.
>
> "Lesbian sadomasochism," Schwarzer replied. I thought I misheard her. "*Lesbian sadomasochism!*" she shouted into the receiver. "It is sweeping your movement. You do not *know*?"

Lesbianism in the seventies had been configured as a loving sisterhood in which sex was less important than consciousness-raising. For many gay women, sadomasochism was an antidote to this tepid formulation. It was permission to focus on what turned them on, rather than what was politically correct, a way of appropriating the lust and power hunger that feminist doctrine had deemed male. "We'd been being egalitarian," Lamar Van Dyke told me. "And suddenly we were over it."

Fights about S & M overlapped with fights about pornography within the women's movement, and the issue became wildly divisive. Feminists "insisted that lesbians should permit themselves only those sexual interests that reflect superior female ideals," Lillian Faderman writes in "Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth Century America." "They feared that the lesbian sexual radicals were not only making a big deal out of sexuality, which should be incidental to lesbianism, but were also deluding themselves and other women into believing that male images, fantasies, and habits were desirable for women too." And there was something to that—Van Dyke calls this period her "Hugh Hefner and dinner jackets" phase.

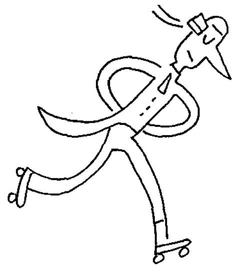
The Van Dykes put on the first S & M "workshop" at the 1979 Michigan Womyn's Music Festival, to the horror of many attendees. "Festivals offer safe spaces for women in recovery from violence," Bonnie J. Morris writes in "Eden Built by Eves: The Culture of Women's Music Festivals." "Whips and chains or dog collars in public space don't suit this goal." Other festivals subsequently adopted a "pro-healing policy," banning public displays of sadomasochism which could cause "psychic damage," in the words of the New England Women's Music Retreat.

All this whipping and spanking seemed to promote an explosiveness among the Van Dykes: mad fits of pettiness became the norm. One night, Heather became jealous when she heard that Brook and Judith planned to go out dancing without her, so she hid Judith's dancing shoes. When, later, Judith found her shoes among Heather's possessions, she retaliated by setting Heather's van on fire. At least, that's how Heather remembers it.

"Lamar would say it was the introduction of S & M that sent me off into a much more straight, marital situation," Chris Fox says. "But I don't think that's true. We went on that trip with the idea that we would save the money and come back and start a community that would be self-sustaining and involve other people and do good things for the world. What that trip taught me was that, in the end, people will act more on their personalities than on their politics."

As Lamar Van Dyke sees it, "I felt like I had been in trouble my whole life for being too big, too loud, too demanding, too bossy, too everything that I am. When I discovered this S & M thing, it was actually a place where people loved me for those things. It was very liberating and quite a treat."

After Heather Van Dyke moved to Seattle, in 1980, and became Lamar, tattoos and leather became the focus of her life. She was a kingpin in the local S & M scene and, once again, had her own devoted following of women. One afternoon in 1994, the phone rang at Tattoo You, Van Dyke's shop, in the Capitol Hill neighborhood. A young-sounding woman asked to speak to Heather Nelson, which completely unnerved Lamar Van Dyke. "There was no reason on earth for anybody to call that tattoo shop and ask for that person—there was no connection," Van Dyke said. "I just went ballistic. I said, 'Who is this? What do you want?' I thought it was the F.B.I. and I hung up."



At her office in Oakland, California, Traci Lewis, the daughter that Van Dyke had given up for adoption after her fling with a Black Panther, twenty-six years earlier, hung up, too. She had spent a month trying to find her birth mother. "She was so evil when I called," Lewis told me. Lewis was raised in an African-American community in Oakland and is very close with her adoptive family. But she always yearned to know the woman who had given birth to her. "I imagined her skinny—in a skintight suit," Lewis said. "Like she was this uptight businesswoman married to some guy named Bob, and I'm just going to bust in there one day and I'm her little black secret." A few days later, Lewis called Tattoo You again, but this time she left a message using the name that she had been given by her mother at birth: Cherise Michelle.

"The top of my head just blew off," Van Dyke said. "It was so emotional I couldn't do anything. I was in here running back and forth, going from the hallway to the kitchen, holding on to my head saying, 'Oh, my God! Oh, my God!' I called my friend J.C. and said, 'You've got to help me. You've got to call her!' Oh, I was crazed. J.C. said, 'Pour yourself some Jack Daniel's and get in the bathtub and I'll call you back.' "

J.C. telephoned Traci Lewis and asked her to state her date of birth and to provide other identifying details. Lewis thought that perhaps her mother was in a witness-protection program.

"Finally, J.C. called back," Van Dyke recalls. "She said, 'O.K., this is the scoop. It's really your daughter. Not only that, but you're a grandmother! Ha!' Well, I lasted about thirty seconds. I just called her and said, 'Hi.' " Van Dyke's voice dropped to a whisper. "We talked on the phone for five hours every night for the next five or six nights."

A few weeks after that phone call, Van Dyke flew to Oakland to meet her daughter's family. Lewis's adoptive mother, Paula, threw a barbecue on her back deck, and Traci's friends and relatives came to celebrate the meeting. "They were just so excited," Lewis said. " 'Traci's found her birth mother! We have to get tattoos!' " The next time that Van Dyke came to visit, she brought along her tattooing equipment: Traci had got a fish tattoo on her ankle; most of her friends requested stars or flowers. It was a relief and a delight, Lewis said, to find out where she came from. "Growing up, I had my own agenda," she told me. "You know how most kids care if they get in trouble? I just marched to the beat of my own drum. I did whatever the hell I felt like."

Lewis, who is forty-two, has never met her biological father. She hopes to find him someday. In 1994, she attended the Black Panthers' thirtieth-anniversary gathering, in Oakland, where she passed out cards with her story, hoping that someone would be able to help. Nobody remembered the man who called himself Arnell, and it's possible, of course, that he wasn't really a Panther.

Van Dyke has pictures all over her house of Lewis, who is as tall as she is, and her two grandchildren: Monique, who is eighteen, and Royce, who is eight. Monique is a freshman at the University of California, Riverside, and Van Dyke keeps a photograph on top of her piano of Monique at a prom, wearing a teal dress and holding her boyfriend's hand, standing in front of a trompe-l'oeil backdrop of a Paris street scene. Traci, Paula, Monique, Royce, and Lamar Van Dyke have been spending the holidays together and going on family vacations for the past fourteen years.

Brook Van Dyke died, of colon cancer, in 2000. Nobody is quite sure what became of Sky. Judith cut off all communication with her rolling sorority after a fight over a T-shirt business that the Van Dykes had. (The shirts said "Killer Dyke" above Heather's drawing of Patty Hearst holding a machine gun, and they were a hot item for a while on the women's-festival circuit.) Thorn Van Dyke went back to being Chris Fox when she settled in Canada after several years on the road. "Now my life is very conventional," Fox, who is fifty-eight, said. "When I returned from my travels"—in 1980—"within seconds of turning thirty, I started the relationship with the woman I'm still living with and got a job at city hall." She also resumed speaking to males, as her new partner had two sons.

On a bright afternoon last April, I went to visit the last of the Van Dykes in downtown Seattle, at Speakeasy, an Internet-service provider where she has worked for five years. It is by far the most mainstream employment that Lamar Van Dyke has ever had. It was a few weeks before her sixty-first birthday, and she had just bought the first new car of her life, a black VW bug. Van Dyke also owns her house, but she doesn't use credit cards. That would cross some kind of line. "I don't want to be a capitalist pig," she explained.

She drove me to the Wild Rose, a lesbian bar next door to the former site of Tattoo You, and inside there were fifteen or so women drinking and several children running between the tables. A woman with short hair and waxed eyebrows who appeared to be about fifty came over and tried to get Van Dyke to look at photographs of her grandchildren; Van Dyke had gone on a date with her once, a few months earlier. But Van Dyke was unmoved and the woman walked away. "I don't want a wife," she told me. "I want somebody that I can run around with . . . like Batman and Robin, you know?"

Van Dyke works with men now, and even speaks to them. She talks about menopause and her grandchildren and her garden, but she is still wild, a big pirate of a woman. Regardless of the different people of different genders she has chosen over the years as her comrades, Van Dyke's primary loyalty has always been to her own adventure. A woman in her sixties who has been resolutely doing as she pleases for as long as she can remember is not easy to come by, in movies or in books, or in life.

"Your generation wants to fit in," she told me, for the second time. "Gays in the military and gay marriage? This is what you guys have come up with?" There was no contempt in her voice; it was something else—an almost incredulous maternal disappointment. "We didn't sit around looking at our phone or looking at our computer or looking at the television—we didn't sit around looking at screens," she said. "We didn't wait for a screen to give us a signal to do something. We were off doing whatever we wanted." ♦

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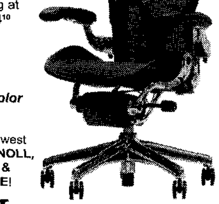

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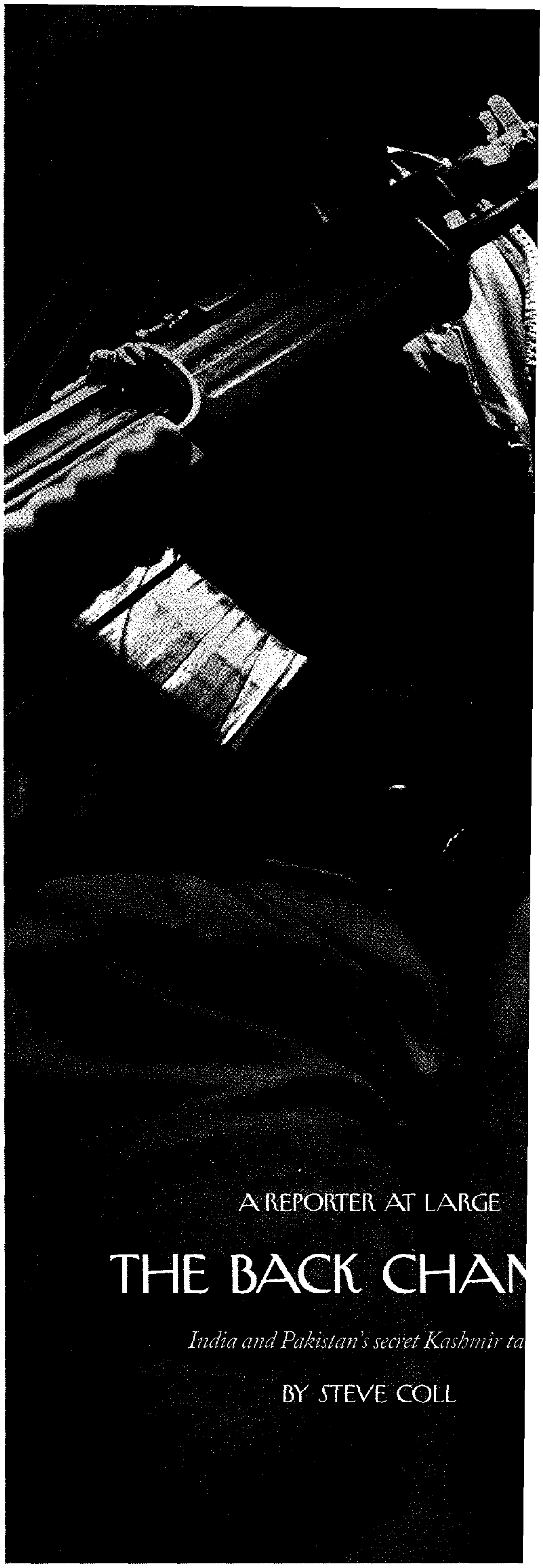
A REPORTER AT LARGE

THE BACK CHAN

India and Pakistan's secret Kashmir ta

BY STEVE COLL



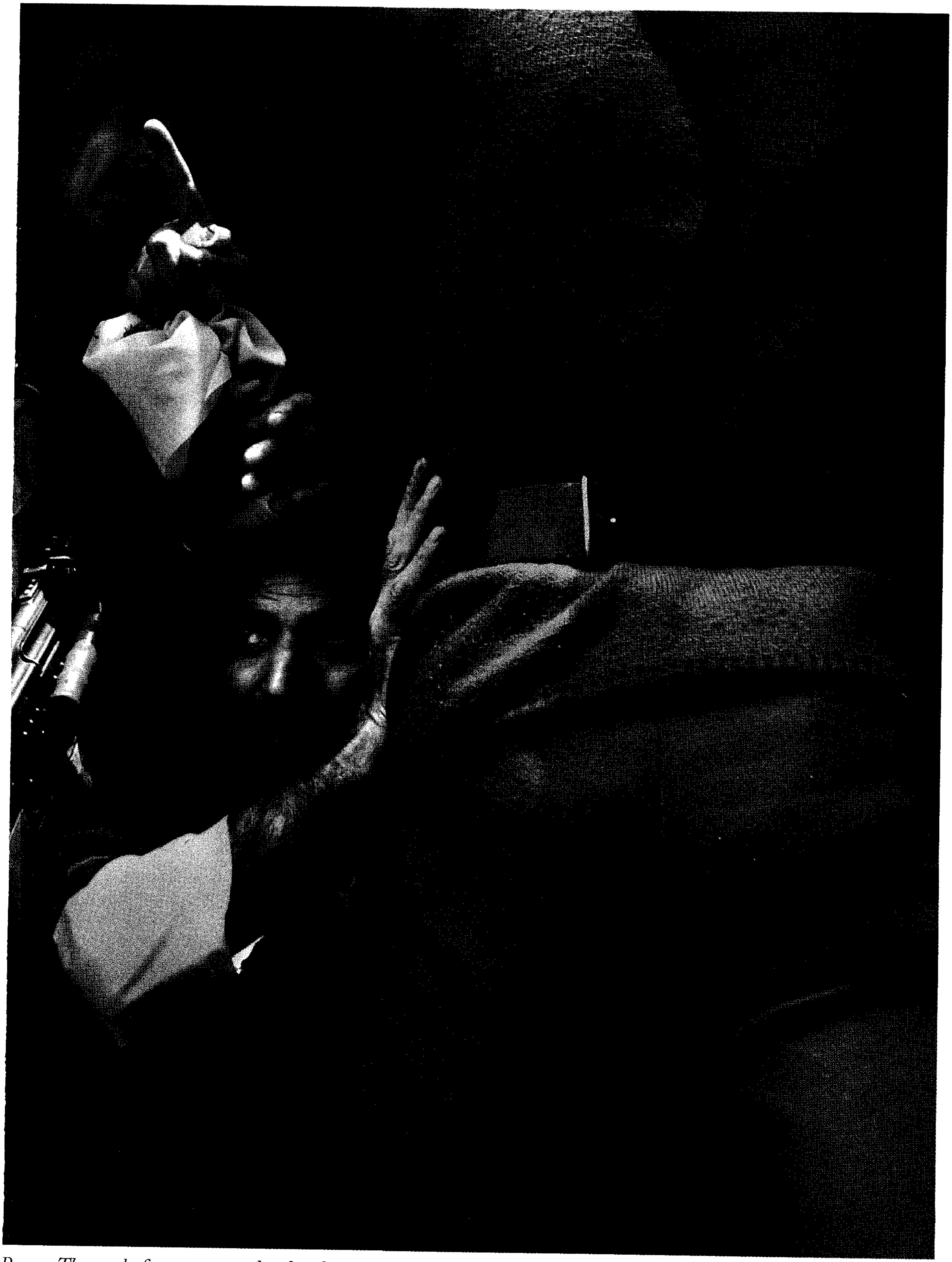
A Kashmiri man arrested protesting in Srinagar with the Asso

Two years ago, Pervez Musharraf, who was then Pakistan's President and Army chief, summoned his most senior generals and two Foreign Ministry officials to a series of meetings at his military office in Rawalpindi. There, they reviewed the progress of a secret, sensitive negotiation with India, known to its participants as "the back channel." For several years, special envoys from Pakistan and India had been holding talks in hotel rooms in Bangkok, Dubai, and London. Musharraf and Manmohan Singh, the Prime Minister of India, had encouraged the negotiators to seek what some involved called a "paradigm shift" in relations between the two nations.

The agenda included a search for an end to the long fight over Kashmir, a contest that is often described by Western military analysts as a potential trigger for atomic war. (India first tested a nuclear weapon in 1974, and Pakistan did so in 1998.) Since achieving independence, in 1947, India and Pakistan have fought three wars and countless skirmishes across Kashmir's mountain passes. The largest part of the territory is occupied by India, and Pakistanis have long rallied around the cause of liberating it. The two principal envoys—for Pakistan, a college classmate of Musharraf's named Tariq Aziz, and, for India, a Russia specialist named Satinder Lambah—were developing what diplomats refer to as a "non-paper" on Kashmir, a text without names or signatures which can serve as a deniable but detailed basis for a deal.

At the Rawalpindi meetings, Musharraf drew his generals into a debate about the fundamental definition of Pakistan's national security. "It was no longer fashionable to think in some of the old terms," Khurshid Kasuri, who was then Foreign Minister, and who attended the sessions, recalled. "Pakistan had become a nuclear power. War was no longer an option for either side." Kasuri said to the generals that only by diplomacy could they achieve their goals in Kashmir. He told them, he recalled, "Put your hand here—on your heart—and tell me that Kashmir will gain freedom" without such a negotiation with India.

The generals at the table accepted this view, Kasuri said. They "trusted Musharraf," he continued. "Their raison



Persons. Thousands of young men are thought to have gone missing during the conflict in Kashmir. Photograph by Ami Vitale.

d'être is not permanent enmity with India. Their raison d'être is Pakistan's permanent security. And what is security? Safety of our borders and our economic development."

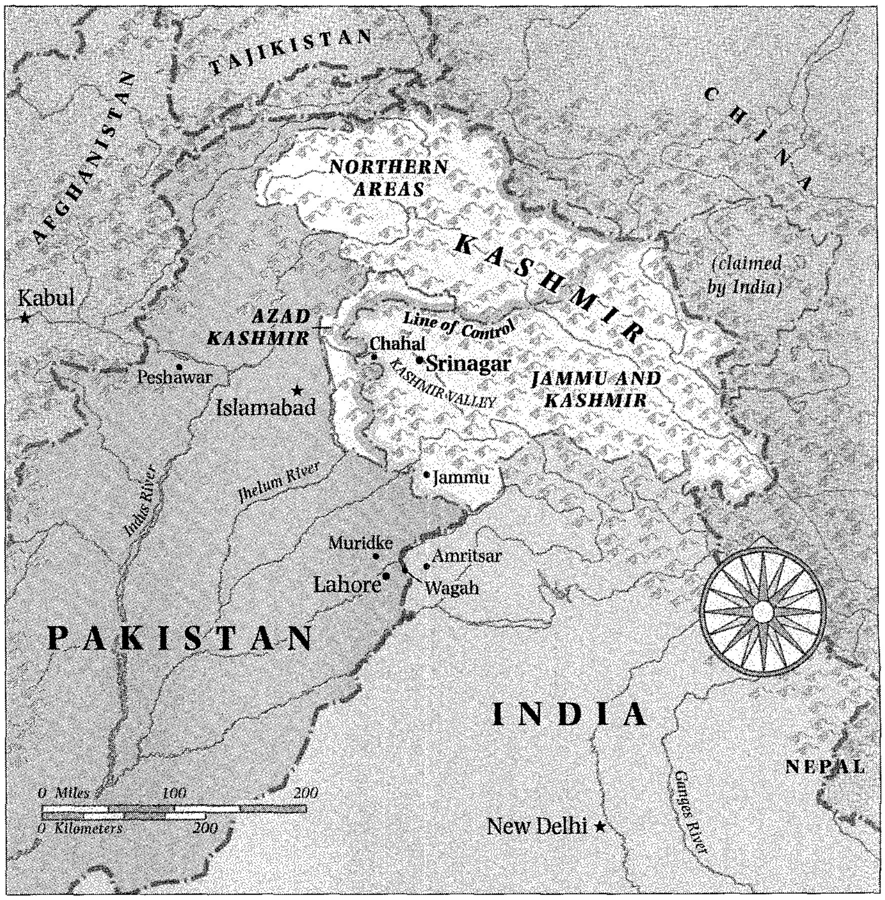
By early 2007, the back-channel talks on Kashmir had become "so advanced that we'd come to semicolons," Kasuri recalled. A senior Indian official who was involved agreed. "It was huge—I think it would have changed the basic nature of the problem," he told me. "You would have then had the freedom to remake Indo-Pakistani relations." Aziz and Lambah were negotiating the details for a visit to Pakistan by the Indian Prime Minister during which, they hoped, the principles underlying the Kashmir agreement would be announced and talks aimed at implementation would be inaugurated. One quarrel, over a waterway known as Sir Creek, would be formally settled.

Neither government, however, had done much to prepare its public for a breakthrough. In the spring of 2007, a military aide in Musharraf's office contacted a senior civilian official to ask how politicians, the media, and the public might react. "We think we're close to a deal," Musharraf's aide said, as this official recalled it. "Do you think we can sell it?"

Regrettably, the time did not look ripe, this official recalled answering. In early March, Musharraf had invoked his near-dictatorial powers to fire the chief justice of the country's highest court. That decision set off rock-tossing protests by lawyers and political activists. The General's popularity seemed to be eroding by the day; he had seized power in a coup in 1999, and had enjoyed public support for several years, but now he was approaching "the point where he couldn't sell himself," the official remembers saying, never mind a surprise peace agreement with India.

Kasuri was among the Musharraf advisers who felt that the Pakistanis should postpone the summit—that they "should not waste" the negotiated draft agreements by revealing them when Musharraf might not be able to forge a national consensus. Even if it became necessary to hold off for months or years, Kasuri believed, "We had done so much work that it will not be lost."

Pakistan's government sent a message to India: Manmohan Singh's visit should be delayed so that Musharraf could regain his political balance. India, too, was facing domestic complications, in the form of regional elections. In New Delhi, the word in national-security circles had been that "any day we're going to have an agreement on Kashmir," Gurmeet Kanwal, a retired Indian brigadier, recalled. "But Musharraf lost his constituencies."



Kashmir has proved resistant to both Indian and Pakistani claims to sovereignty there.

JEFFREY WARD

Rather than recovering, the General slipped into a political death spiral. Armed Islamist radicals took control of the Red Mosque, in Islamabad, and, in July, Musharraf ordered a commando raid to expel them. Sensing a political opening, the country's two most popular civilian politicians, Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif, whom Musharraf had forced into exile, agitated to be allowed to return. By year's end, public pressure had forced Musharraf to give up his Army command. A suicide bomber murdered Bhutto in a public park just a month later. Her widower, Asif Zardari, led their political party to victory in an election in which voters repudiated Musharraf and his political allies. In August, 2008, Musharraf resigned and retired from public life.

In the sixty-one years of their existence, the governments of India and Pakistan have periodically funded covert campaigns of guerrilla or terrorist violence on each other's soil; as a result, each now holds unshakable assumptions about the other's proclivity for dirty tricks. In Pakistan, for example, it is an article of faith among many senior Army officers that India's foreign-intelligence service, the Research and Analysis Wing, or R.A.W., is providing guns and money to ethnic Baluch and Pashtun groups that operate along the Afghan border, and who seek to separate from or overthrow the Pakistani government. Equally, in India's cabinet and parliament, it is taken for granted that the Pakistan Army leadership provides aid to jihadi groups so that they can carry out terrorist attacks on Indian soil—the latest example being the band of ten young men who arrived in an inflatable dinghy at Mumbai's Badhwar Park last November 26th.

The Mumbai attackers carried G.P.S. navigational equipment, a satellite telephone, cell phones suitable for local Mumbai networks, grenades, Kalashnikovs, and 9-millimetre pistols, which they employed to kill a hundred and sixty-five people, including six Americans, during a three-day spree of nihilistic violence. More than most cells that have turned up in India in recent years, the terrorists had production values that seemed inspired by the September 11th attacks: they struck at multiple sites in the heart of India's financial district and exploited live television and radio coverage.

Indian security services managed to intercept the attackers' telephone calls, and discovered that they were speaking to handlers in Pakistan. The Indians assembled a dossier, containing excerpts of these conversations, translated into English, which they presented to Pakistan, the United States, and other governments; one version ran to a hundred and eighteen pages. In one intercept, the terrorists rejoice because television anchors are comparing their work to 9/11. In tone and rhythm, the excerpts suggest something of the banality of cell-phone-enabled mass murder:

CALLER: Let me talk to Umar.

RECEIVER: Note a number. Number is 0043720880764.

CALLER: Whose number is this?

RECEIVER: It is mine. The phone is with me.

CALLER: ... Allah is helping you.... Try to set the place on fire.

RECEIVER: We have set fire in four rooms.

CALLER: People shall run helter skelter when they see the flames. Keep throwing a grenade every fifteen minutes or so. It will terrorize.

Here, talk to "Baba."

CALLER (2): A lot of policemen and Navy personnel have covered the entire area. Be brave!

The dossier leaves little doubt that the attack originated in Pakistan: a man using a Pakistani passport paid for the terrorists' phone services; their pistols were engraved with a manufacturer's address in Peshawar; and numerous provisions recovered from a fishing trawler that the group used to reach Mumbai from Karachi were made in Pakistan.

More specifically, the Indian government's dossier concludes that the Mumbai attack was coördinated by Lashkar-e-Taiba, or the Army of the Pure—a Pakistan-based, Saudi-influenced Islamist terrorist and guerrilla force that fights mainly in Kashmir. A decade ago, Lashkar's emir, Hafiz Saeed, announced his intention to destroy India: "We will not rest until the whole [of] India is dissolved into Pakistan." After the Mumbai attack, Saeed delivered a public sermon in Lahore in which he spoke approvingly of a new "awakening" among Indian Muslims, and described his co-religionists as "second to none in taking revenge." A satellite-telephone conversation between one of the Mumbai terrorists and a supervisor in Pakistan, intercepted independently by the United States, also points to Lashkar's involvement in the raid.

After many weeks of prevarication, Pakistani officials conceded that the Mumbai attackers appear to have come from their country. Pakistan has detained and filed criminal charges against at least one senior Lashkar commander named in the Indian dossier. But it remains unclear how far Pakistan will go to dismantle Lashkar. Since the early nineteen-nineties, Pakistan's principal military-intelligence service, Inter-Services Intelligence, or I.S.I., has armed and funded Lashkar to foment upheaval in Indian-held Kashmir. Although many of Pakistan's generals are secular or apolitically religious, they have sponsored jihadis as a low-cost means of keeping India off balance.

The historical ties between Lashkar and the Pakistani security services are for the most part undisputed; one book that describes them, published in 2005 and entitled "Between Mosque and Military," was written by Husain Haqqani, who is currently Pakistan's Ambassador to the United States. However, Brigadier Nazir Butt, a defense attaché at the Embassy in Washington, denied that his government had provided lethal aid to Lashkar or to other violent groups. "Pakistan only extended moral and diplomatic support to the Kashmiri struggle for self-determination," he said. "After 9/11, Pakistan withdrew all its support for Kashmiri organizations and, as a consequence, drew violent attacks on its military and national leadership."

American officials, who rely upon the I.S.I.'s coöperation in their campaigns against Al Qaeda and the Taliban along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border, continue to say that there is no evidence that active I.S.I. personnel participated in or knew in advance about the Mumbai strike. Yet critical evidence, such as interrogations conducted in Pakistan, is effectively under I.S.I. control; agents from the Federal Bureau of Investigation, which has jurisdiction in the matter under U.S. law, because American citizens were among the victims, have been denied direct access to the Lashkar suspects.

It's also true that Pakistan's government has itself been on the receiving end of jihadi attacks in the past year. "It's not as if all this stuff is external and going into India," one official from a NATO government said. "They don't have the capacity to defend Islamabad and Peshawar. They're losing ground." Taliban-led insurgents today control large swaths of territory in Pakistan's northwest, where they enforce a brutal regime of Islamic justice, and recently signed a truce with the government in the Swat valley. They have mounted a bombing campaign that has reached Islamabad; some of the bombs have been aimed at the Army and the I.S.I., suggesting a loss of control by the I.S.I. over its jihadi clients, or a split within the Pakistani security services, or both.

In January, Prime Minister Singh remarked that the Mumbai attack could not have been carried out without "the support of some official agencies in Pakistan." India nevertheless reacted to the attack with relative restraint. Singh's government has not ordered a major military mobilization, nor has it launched any retaliatory strikes against Pakistan. Were it not for the back-channel talks, the response might not have been so measured: Singh and at least some of his civilian counterparts in Pakistan hope to find their way back to the non-paper. But this will be possible only if jihadis don't provoke a war first.

Many Indian politicians and security analysts continue to call for military action. Some predicted to me that additional jihadi attacks would take place during India's upcoming national election, in May; if such strikes do occur, they said, it would be difficult for India's democratic government to resist public calls for retaliation. For now, however, the decisions belong to Singh, a seventy-six-year-old Cambridge-educated economist who recently underwent heart-bypass surgery. Singh's decision-making appears to be grounded in military realism; if India were to launch even selective strikes, it would likely only deepen Pakistan's internal turmoil and thus exacerbate the terrorist threat faced by India. Any Indian military action would also risk an escalation that could include nuclear deployments—which may be precisely what the jihadi leaders hoped to provoke. "There is no military option here," Lalit Mansingh, a former Indian Ambassador in Washington, said. India had to "isolate the terrorist elements" in Pakistan, he said, not "rally the nation around them."

Negotiators involved in the secret back channel regarded the effort as politically risky and exceptionally ambitious—a potential turning point in history, as one official put it, comparable to the peace forged between Germany and France after the Second World War. At issue, they believed, was not just a settlement in Kashmir itself but an end to their debilitating covert wars and, eventually, their paranoiac mutual suspicions. They hoped to develop a new regime of free trade and political coöperation in the region, from Central Asia to Bangladesh. On January 8, 2007, at the height of this optimistic interval, Manmohan Singh remarked in public, "I dream of a day, while retaining our respective national identities, one can have breakfast in Amritsar, lunch in Lahore, and dinner in Kabul."

These hopes, however quixotic, reflected a competition between two schools of radical thought: the millenarian terrorism of jihadi groups and their supporters; and the less well-known search by sections of the Indian and Pakistani élites for a transformational peace. For both groups, Kashmir is symbolically and ideologically important. It is also, still, a territory of grinding, unfinished war.

Indian paramilitaries had placed Srinagar under an undeclared curfew on the morning this winter when I sought to drive out of the city, which is the summer capital of India's Jammu and Kashmir state. I wanted to visit a gravedigger in the northern sector of the Kashmir Valley, about fifteen miles from the heavily militarized de-facto border between India and Pakistan known as the Line of Control.

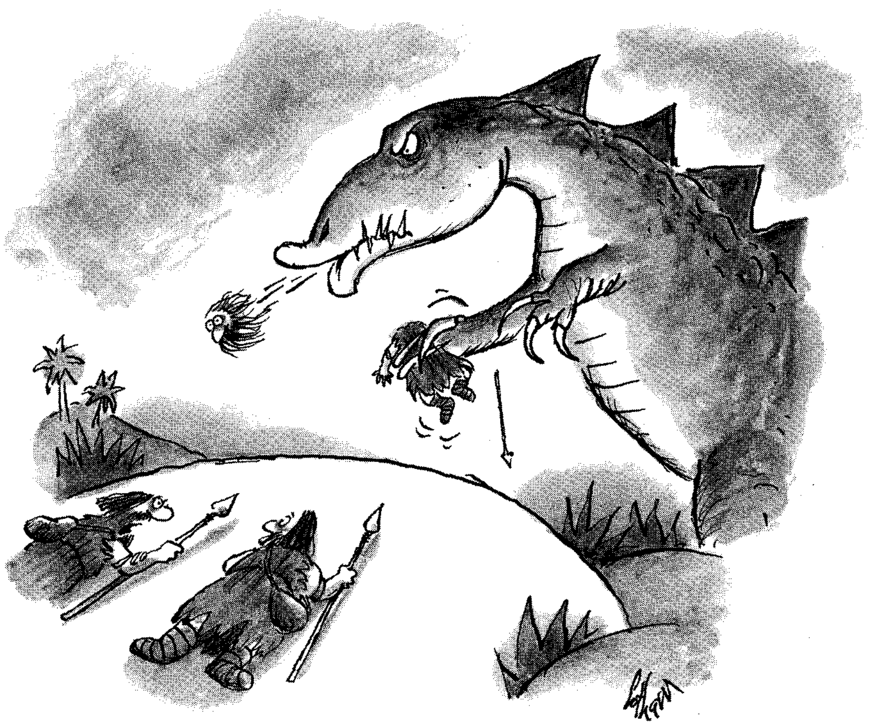
Soldiers in overcoats and olive helmets huddled at checkpoints before open fires; they waved tree branches or batons to stop cars for inspection. The Indian troops on occupation duty in Kashmir—about five hundred thousand soldiers and paramilitaries—rarely speak the Kashmiri dialect. Locals resent them, and they return the attitude. I was travelling with a Kashmiri journalist, Basharat Peer, who is the author of a forthcoming book, "Curfewed Nights," a coming-of-age narrative set amid the region's revolts and security crackdowns. Basharat's press credentials had expired, but he had recently completed a fellowship at Columbia University, and he had his library card; at difficult moments, we thrust it through the window and shouted "New York!," as if it trumped all rules—and, each time, the soldiers backed off and waved us through.

We passed north, through rice paddies and apple orchards—haunted-looking rows of barren trees. On the horizon rose the snowy ridges of Himalayan foothills. Convoys of troop carriers, water haulers, military tow trucks, and jeeps clogged the highway until we turned down an embankment to the village of Chahal, a hamlet of perhaps a hundred tin-roofed houses among terraced fields beside the Jhelum River.

Kashmiri villagers inhabit a political space confined by roaming guerrillas on one side—some of them local boys, some foreign jihadis from Pakistan—and by Indian troops on the other. At the top of a hill, we found the residue of India's counter-insurgency campaign: a new concrete school and clinic, constructed by India's government to appease the villagers, and beside it, encircled by barbed wire, a field of muddy dunes that held the unmarked graves of about two hundred young men whose unidentified bodies had been delivered for burial by the Indian Army.

"Ideally, I want a guy whose eyes will well up but who doesn't actually cry."

Just under a thousand graves containing the corpses of unknown young men have been discovered in Kashmir so far by investigators from the Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons, a small advocacy organization in Srinagar. Last year, a grenade was tossed at the house of the lawyer who advises the group; he and his colleagues have expanded their field surveys nonetheless. They believe that the bodies they have found are among about eight thousand young men who have gone missing during the latest round of Kashmir's wars; they hypothesize that Indian security forces detained many of the victims in secret prisons, tortured them, and shot them. Indian officials reject these allegations; they have estimated the number of missing Kashmiri men at about four thousand, and speculated that they left for Pakistan for training so that they could fight against India, only to fall in combat when they returned.



"This tarnishes his legacy as a great hunter."

In a small stone house, I met Atta Muhammad Khan, a slight man with a trimmed white beard, who is the guardian of Chahal's tombs of unknown rebels. His work began in the late spring of 2002, he told me, when a Kashmiri policeman arrived in the village with a corpse in a truck. The policeman said that the victim was a Pakistani-supported militant who had been shot dead in battle. "They started bringing bodies every ten days, eight days, fifteen days, at times twice in one day," Khan said.

Villages such as Chahal that are known to contain such graves have become magnets for Kashmiri families who are looking for missing sons. When family members arrive bearing photographs or other scraps of evidence, Khan will exhume bodies for them. The gravedigger is himself a searcher; his nephew, whom he raised, disappeared in 2002.

The Kashmir problem has a textbook quality: a dispute of more than six decades' duration, involving British colonial concessions, United Nations resolutions, and a long record of formal negotiations. But it is the character of the war within Kashmir—the torture centers, the unmarked graves, and the remorseless violence of the jihadis—that better describes the contours of Indo-Pakistani enmity today. In one sense, the recent back-channel talks, with their promise of a cleansing peace, have offered each government a path to evade responsibility for the evisceration of Kashmiri villages and families.

India and Pakistan each claims sovereignty in Kashmir, but neither has found a way to control the land or its people. These failures are rooted in what was perhaps Great Britain's greatest imperial crime, the partition of its Indian domain, which ignited violence that claimed about a million lives. In 1947, the British government, bankrupted by the Second World War, hastily completed a plan to divide the subcontinent into the newly independent nations of India and Pakistan. The status of a few territories proved difficult to adjudicate. One was the former princely state of Jammu and Kashmir, ruled by a Hindu maharaja and largely inhabited by poor Muslim peasants. Under Britain's demographic formula, territories with Muslim majorities were supposed to go to Pakistan, but the maharaja signed an accession agreement to join India. A year later, Pakistan tried to wrest away the territory by sending in a tribal guerrilla force, a gambit that ended in a military stalemate. In a sense, the war of guerrilla infiltration that Pakistan initiated in 1948 has never ended.

In 1972, after their third formal war, India and Pakistan established the Line of Control and deployed artillery and infantry along its length. On the Indian side lay most of Kashmir, as well as the Hindu-majority region of Jammu and the Buddhist-influenced region of Ladakh. On the Pakistani side lay a sliver of land now known as Azad Kashmir and a Himalayan region of Muslim tribes known as the Northern Areas. For almost two decades, a relative calm prevailed, but in late 1989—inspired by the fall of the Berlin Wall—Kashmiris on the Indian side, who were fed up with rigged elections and job discrimination, staged a mass revolt. The I.S.I., which had used Islamist militias during the anti-Soviet campaigns in Afghanistan, reacted opportunistically, by arming those Islamist factions of the rebellion which sought to join Kashmir to Pakistan.

Initially, when Kashmiri Muslim boys from villages such as Chahal sneaked across the Line of Control for weapons and training, I.S.I. officers encouraged them to join a local Islamist guerrilla group known as the Hezb-ul-Mujahideen, which was affiliated with the international networks of the Muslim Brotherhood. During the late nineties, however, Pakistan shifted much of its support to Lashkar-e-Taiba, which adhered to the Salafi strain of Islamist thought prevalent in Saudi Arabia, and later to a jihadi group called Jaish-e-Mohammed, or the Army of Mohammed. The membership of these second-wave groups came not from Kashmir itself but from the Punjab, Pakistan's most populous province, where the suffering of fellow-Muslims in Kashmir is routinely exploited by religious and nationalistic political parties. Lashkar's volunteers collaborated with Hezb-ul-Mujahideen cells, but they weren't fighting and dying in Kashmir because their families had ties to the disputed land; they were there because they believed that God had called them to liberate the region's Muslims from Hindu control.

At least fifty thousand people have died in Kashmir's violence since 1989. The pace of the killing has declined in recent years, but bombings and assassinations persist. Last August, on the highway just above Chahal, Indian paramilitaries shot and killed at least fifteen unarmed protesters marching toward the Line of Control; the shooting touched off yet more street protests. In the satellite-television age, the suffering of Kashmiri civilians has not been broadcast as often or as vividly as that of Palestinians or Lebanese, but on Al Jazeera and on Web sites from Britain to Bangladesh the war has been a major point of grievance. The Indian government has long resisted scrutiny of its human-rights record in Kashmir and deflects blame for the violence onto Pakistan's support for jihadi groups. Special laws shield Indian security forces from accountability for deaths in custody, despite ample evidence that there have been many hundreds of such cases. Even India's urban liberal élite remains in denial about its government's record of torture and extrajudicial killing, Meenakshi Ganguly, a senior researcher for Human Rights Watch, said. "In the history books, Kashmir is going to be where justice completely failed the promises of Indian democracy," she said.

India's campaign to defeat the jihadis has, in some ways, become subtler and more effective. In 2002, the government held an election in Kashmir, judged locally as fair, which lured fence-sitting separatist Kashmiri politicians into greater coöperation with New Delhi. Last winter, when I visited, India was concluding a second successful regional election, in which Kashmiris turned out in record numbers. One afternoon, on the eve of the final round of voting, I visited the gated home of Mirwaiz Umer Farooq, one of Kashmir's best-known nonviolent separatist leaders. He had been placed under house arrest, so we spoke by cell phone as I sat outside his driveway.

Farooq's coalition, called the Hurriyat, had decided to boycott the election, a tactic that now looked like a mistake, since so many Kashmiris had chosen to participate. India has spent large sums on jobs and infrastructure projects, gradually convincing many war-weary civilians and politicians that they can regard regional elections not as a source of sovereign legitimacy for India but as a means to control their local affairs. "We are not in a position to address people's concerns about water, electricity, and jobs," Farooq admitted.

The back-channel negotiations have also helped to quell mainstream Kashmiri separatism. At times secretly and at other times publicly, Musharraf and Singh each began discussions with Hurriyat and other local groups about the terms of an eventual settlement, drawing them in. "Musharraf was someone who was willing to think out of the box," Farooq continued. "It is not an insoluble situation."

As violence has declined, the government has closed the worst of its detention centers. Yet its over-all progress has only clarified for Indian strategists the ongoing failure to stop the I.S.I. from infiltrating jihadi guerrillas across the Line of Control.

One morning after my visit to Chahal, I drove up a pine-tree-lined hill above Srinagar's Dal Lake, past a manicured golf course, to Raj Bhavan, a whitewashed colonial-era estate. I had come to see N. N. Vohra, a white-haired career civil servant who last summer was appointed the governor of Jammu and Kashmir. Imperial histories and biographies lined the bookshelves in Vohra's office; an oil portrait of Mohandas K. Gandhi hung on the wall beside his desk. The Governor told me that "whatever Islamabad may say to the world, and particularly to American leadership," he did not feel that Pakistan had fully dealt with the I.S.I. and its "vested interest in keeping this Kashmir front alive."

A STREET

I used to be your favorite drunk
Good for one more laugh
Then we both ran out of luck
And luck was all we had

You put on a uniform
To fight the Civil War
I tried to join but no one liked
The side I'm fighting for

So let's drink to when it's over
And let's drink to when we meet
I'll be standing on this corner
Where there used to be a street

You left me with the dishes
And a baby in the bath
And you're tight with the militias
You wear their camouflage

I guess that makes us equal
But I want to march with you
An extra in the sequel
To the old red-white-and-blue

So let's drink to when it's over
And let's drink to when we meet
I'll be standing on this corner
Where there used to be a street

I cried for you this morning
And I'll cry for you again
But I'm not in charge of sorrow
So please don't ask me when

I know the burden's heavy
As you bear it through the night
Some people say it's empty
But that doesn't mean it's light

So let's drink to when it's over
And let's drink to when we meet
I'll be standing on this corner
Where there used to be a street

It's going to be September now
For many years to come
Every heart adjusting
To that strict September drum

I see the Ghost of Culture
With numbers on his wrist
Salute some new conclusion
Which all of us have missed

So let's drink to when it's over
And let's drink to when we meet
I'll be standing on this corner
Where there used to be a street

—*Leonard Cohen*

Vohra said that when he first arrived as governor he received daily briefings from intelligence officers about interrogation reports, electronic intercepts, and other evidence of I.S.I. activity along the Line of Control. He asked for copies of the raw intercept recordings so he could listen himself. What he heard, he said, was controllers speaking to jihadi commanders inside Kashmir for "twenty-five, thirty minutes" at a time. "And they are very specific, very specific—to go for this target. . . . They said, 'Task No. 1: Eliminate the most senior leaders available.' And they mentioned some—I won't mention the names. And then, 'B, go for the larger rallies of the big leaders—throw grenades, shoot, bombs, I.E.D.s, whatever.' . . . And the kinds of rewards that are mentioned, *rewards that will* be given—lifetime, if you bump off a Grade A leader. If you injure them, you get three hundred thousand rupees."

Vohra had doubts about the Pakistan military's capacity for change. "I was very much hoping in the last four years that they are now progressively seeing the great wisdom and the enormous benefit of not spending all their resources on building up their armies and their armed forces to deal with India—and to subvert and infiltrate," he said. "There has been a thaw, obviously, quite visibly. The levels of infiltration have gone down. But they haven't given up. And that's the worrying part."

A few days later, I arrived at Wagah, in the Punjab, the primary official land border crossing between India and Pakistan. A winter fog had reduced visibility to a few yards. Five dozen Tata trucks loaded with potatoes and other goods idled in a line facing Pakistan. The border compound has the look of a government park; rows of eucalyptus trees drape manicured lawns. The Indian and Pakistani militaries coöperate at the Wagah crossing. On most days, rival honor guards march and drill on adjoining parade grounds; on Pakistan's side, grandstands have been erected so that spectators can enjoy the show, which has grown into a kind of martial battle of the bands, in which each side strives to excel in the performance categories of goose-stepping and glaring. Only very tall soldiers need apply for duty at Wagah; each country seeks to conjure the illusion that its Army is a legion of giants.

After four cups of tea, several signatures in clothbound ledgers, and some subtle talk of gratuities, two porters carried my bags on their heads to a metal gate. A protocol officer waited inside Pakistan; I had an appointment with Nawaz Sharif, the former Pakistani Prime Minister, who lived nearby, on a family compound outside Lahore.

Squads of police guard the Sharif estate, a walled expanse of orchards, wheat fields, and pens filled with deer and peacocks. In the main house, the former Prime Minister greeted me in a grand reception chamber flanked by two life-size stuffed lions, and decorated with pink sofas, matching pink Oriental carpets, and gold-plated antelope figurines. He is a rotund, clean-shaven man who, remarkably, retains the youthful look of a person unburdened by stress.

In 1999, less than a year after he authorized Pakistan's nuclear test, Sharif initiated a precursor to the back-channel talks. In February of that year, Sharif invited India's Prime Minister at the time, Atal Behari Vajpayee, to attend a summit in Lahore. The two governments signed a memorandum of understanding; they also commissioned secret, exploratory talks by special emissaries. Sharif designated an aide, Anwar Zahid, and Vajpayee named a journalist, R. K. Mishra. "It was basically on Kashmir," Sharif recalled. "In the early days, we were not really having any consensus on anything. But the mere fact that the back channel was established was a big development. It was doing some serious work."

At the time, Sharif shared power uneasily with Musharraf, whom he had appointed as Chief of Army Staff. Musharraf "found the Lahore summit galling," as Strobe Talbott, who was then the United States' Deputy Secretary of State, put it in a memoir. In these years, Musharraf, "like so many of his fellow officers . . . was a revanchist on the issue of Kashmir." Musharraf apparently decided to break up the peace talks. He authorized a reckless incursion of Army personnel disguised as guerrillas into a mountainous area of Kashmir known as Kargil. A small-scale war erupted; at one point, the Clinton Administration believed that Pakistan's Army had taken steps to mobilize its nuclear weapons. Musharraf has said that he briefed Sharif on the Kargil operation; Sharif denied this. "I think the back channel was making good progress," he told me. "But soon after, you see, it was sabotaged by Mr. Musharraf—a misadventure that was ill-advised, ill-executed, poorly planned." A few months afterward, Sharif tried to fire the General; Musharraf seized power and threw Sharif in jail. After President Clinton intervened, Sharif was released into exile in Saudi Arabia.

India's leaders initially mistrusted Musharraf because he was the author of Kargil, but gradually, as Mansingh, then India's Ambassador to the United States, recalled, "We found he was a man we could talk to." After 2002, India's economy began to grow more quickly and steadily than at any time since independence; the ranks of its middle-class consumers swelled; and it became possible for Indian strategists to visualize their country rising to become a great power by the mid-twenty-first century. Only a catastrophic war with Pakistan—or Pakistan's collapse into chaos—would stand in the way of India's greatness. "We were convinced these two countries must learn to live in accord—must," Jaswant Singh, who was then India's foreign minister, said.

In time, Musharraf's thinking about India and Kashmir seemed to change, too. Late in 2003, splinter cells from Jaish-e-Mohammed twice tried to assassinate him. "This is what turns him decisively," Maleeha Lodhi, then Pakistan's high commissioner in London, recalled. Just weeks afterward, Musharraf met Vajpayee in Islamabad and agreed to an unprecedented joint statement: the Pakistani President would "not permit any territory under Pakistan's control to be used to support terrorism in any manner." The two leaders announced new formal negotiations between their foreign ministries, which were known as the Composite Dialogue. Privately, they re-started the back-channel talks on Kashmir.

During the next two years, Musharraf delivered India proof of his sincerity. Guerrilla infiltrations into Indian-held territory declined; Pakistani artillery units stopped their salvos on Indian posts, which had been used as cover for infiltrating jihadis. Indian officials concluded that Musharraf—whether by an iron hand or by building a consensus—had persuaded his senior generals to accept the potential benefits of peace negotiations.

At the landmark meetings he convened at Rawalpindi, Musharraf talked about how a peace settlement might produce economic benefits that could strengthen Pakistan—and its military. The Army had a fifteen-year development plan; the generals knew that the plan would be difficult to pay for without rapid growth. "I was very happy to see how much focus there was on the economy among the Army's officers," Khurshid Kasuri, the former Foreign Minister, recalled.

Mahmud Durrani, a retired major general who was then Musharraf's Ambassador in Washington, said that this new attitude reflected a broader change in outlook. Commanders were asking, he recalled, "Can my economy support me? Can my foreign policy support me? What does the world think of us?"

There was "the feeling that the world is changing and that we have to change," Khalid Mahmood, who was then Kasuri's chief of staff, recalled. "It was not easy. There were people who felt that the President has made a U-turn."

To refine the non-paper, Musharraf relied intuitively on his college friend Tariq Aziz, a civil servant who had made his career in Pakistan's federal tax department, a bridge enthusiast who seems to some of his colleagues to live precariously on tobacco and adrenaline. Aziz's Indian counterparts—J. N. Dixit, Singh's national-security adviser, followed by Satinder Lambah—worked more formally. The Indians typically brought note-takers to the secret hotel sessions overseas, whereas Aziz travelled alone, rarely carried a briefcase, and often had to scribble his notes on hotel stationery. Altogether, there were about two dozen of these hotel sessions between 2004 and early 2007, according to people familiar with them.

The envoys worked on a number of long-standing territorial disputes, including the problem of Siachen, a heavily militarized glacier where Indian and Pakistani soldiers skirmish at heights above twenty thousand feet, battering each other's snowbound positions with artillery shells. But a Kashmir settlement would be the grand prize.

To outsiders, it has long seemed obvious that the Line of Control should be declared the international border between India and Pakistan—it's been in place for almost forty years, and each country has built its own institutions behind it. Musharraf, however, made it clear from the start that this would be unacceptable; India was equally firm that it would never renegotiate its borders or the Line of Control. The way out of this impasse, Singh has said, was to "make borders irrelevant," by allowing for the free movement of people and goods within an autonomous Kashmir region. For Pakistan, this formula might work if it included provisions for the protection—and potential enrichment, through free trade—of the people of Kashmir, in whose name Pakistan had carried on the conflict.

The most recent version of the non-paper, drafted in early 2007, laid out several principles for a settlement, according to people who have seen the draft or have participated in the discussions about it. Kashmiris would be given special rights to move and trade freely on both sides of the Line of Control. Each of the former princely state's distinct regions would receive a measure of autonomy—details would be negotiated later. Providing that violence declined, each side would gradually withdraw its troops from the region. At some point, the Line of Control might be acknowledged by both governments as an international border. It is not clear how firm a commitment on a final border the negotiators were prepared to make, or how long it would all take; one person involved suggested a time line of about ten to fifteen years.

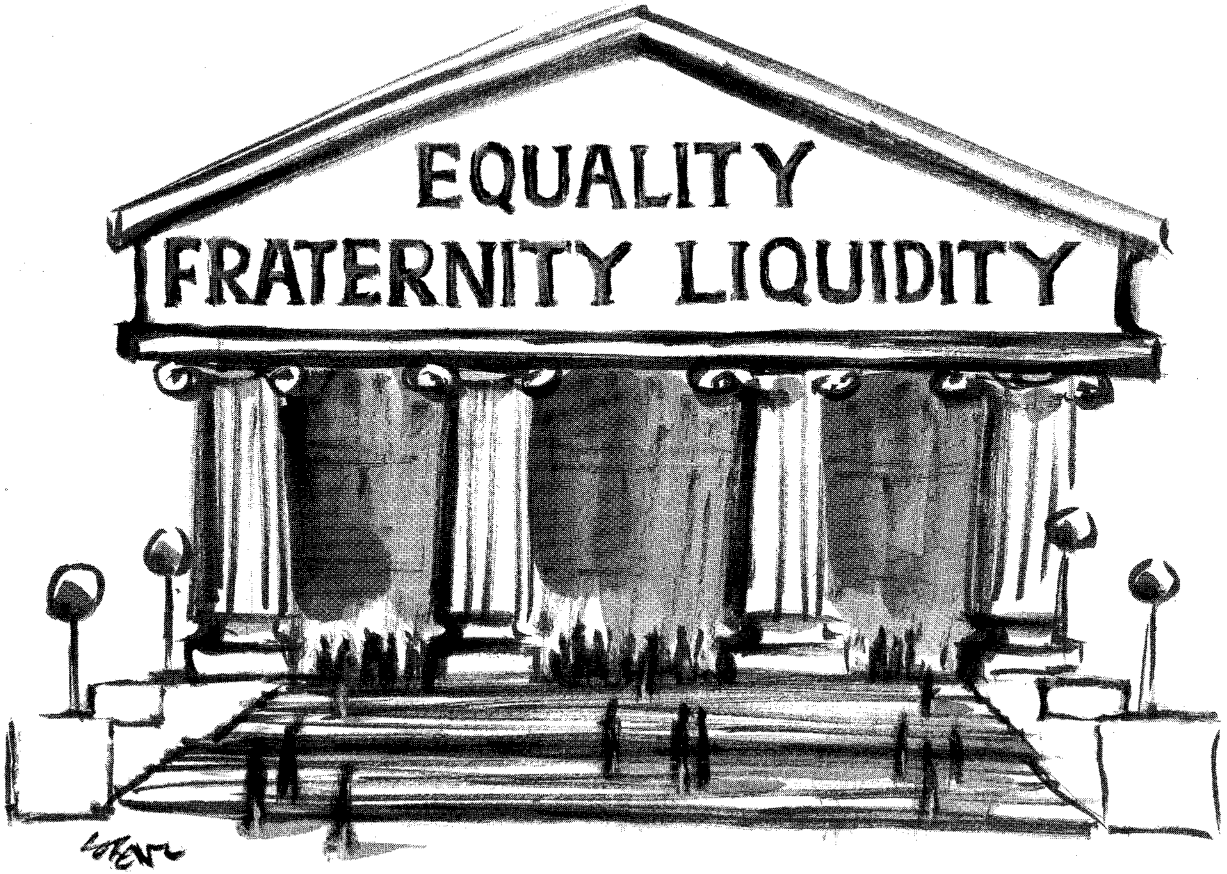
One of the most difficult issues involved a plan to establish a joint body, made up of local Kashmiri leaders, Indians, and Pakistanis, to oversee issues that affected populations on both sides of the Line of Control, such as water rights. Pakistan sought something close to shared governance, with the Kashmiris taking a leading role; India, fearing a loss of sovereignty, wanted much less power-sharing. The envoys wrestled intensively over what language to use to describe the scope of this new body; the last draft termed it a "joint mechanism."

Manmohan Singh's government feared that successor Pakistani regimes would repudiate any Kashmir bargain forged by Musharraf, who had, after all, come to power in a coup. The Indians were not sure that a provisional peace deal could be protected "from the men of violence—on both sides," the senior Indian official who was involved recalled. And they wondered whether the Pakistan Army had really embraced the non-paper framework or merely saw the talks as a ploy to buy time and win favor in Washington while continuing to support the jihadis. "I remember asking Tariq Aziz, 'Is the Army on board? Right now?' " the senior official recalled. "As long as Musharraf was the chief, had the uniform, I think he had a valid answer. He said, 'Yes, the chief is doing this.' "

As the peace talks stalled and Musharraf's power waned during the first half of 2008, the I.S.I., or sections of it, appeared to be reënlisting jihadi groups. On July 7th, a suicide bomber rammed a car loaded with explosives into the gates of India's Embassy in Kabul, killing fifty-four people, including the Indian defense attaché. The United States intercepted communications between active I.S.I. personnel and the Taliban-aligned network of Jalaluddin Haqqani, which is believed by U.S. military and intelligence officials to have carried out the Kabul Embassy attack. Haqqani has a long history of collaboration and contact with the I.S.I.; he was also a paid client of the Central Intelligence Agency during the late nineteen-eighties. On September 4th, less than three weeks after Musharraf's resignation as Pakistan's President, Kashmiri militant groups, including Lashkar-e-Taiba, appeared at a large open rally in Muzaffarabad, the capital of Pakistan-held Kashmir; the Pakistan Army has a heavy presence in this city, and it is unlikely that such an event could have taken place without the I.S.I.'s sanction. The rally seemed designed to send a message across the Line of Control: Musharraf is gone, but the Kashmir war is alive.

"We asked them specifically, 'How is all this going on if you say the Army's on board?' " the senior Indian official recalled. "They kept saying, 'Give us a chance. We need time. Yes, yes, the Army's on board.' "

In October, Durrani, who was then Pakistan's national-security adviser, travelled to New Delhi and met with members of India's National Security Advisory Board. Indian Army officers presented "some very nice colored charts," as Durrani put it, documenting recent increases in ceasefire violations and jihadi infiltrations along the Line of Control. Durrani found the charts "a bit one-sided," but when he returned to Islamabad he sought explanations about the violations from Pakistan Army commanders. In January, Durrani was fired after making public statements that



Victoria Roberts

"The things that should bother me don't—should I be worried?"

were seen in Pakistan as too accommodating of India.

The apparent revival of the I.S.I.'s covert operations influenced the Singh government's assessment of who was likely responsible for the Mumbai attack. "It appears there has been a change in policy," V. P. Malik, a former Indian Chief of Army Staff, who now heads an influential security-studies institute in New Delhi, said. "They really have not taken action against these outfits, their leaders and their infrastructure."

Pakistan's new civilian President, Asif Zardari, had entered into his own struggle with those in the Pakistani security services who favor the jihadis and covert war against India. Zardari's Pakistan Peoples Party has fought the Army for power since the late nineteen-seventies; neither institution fully trusts the other, although they have sometimes collaborated. (Some P.P.P. officials believe that the I.S.I. may have been involved in Benazir Bhutto's murder.) Last May, Zardari tried to assert civilian control over the I.S.I. by placing it under the authority of the Interior Ministry; the Army rejected this order, and Zardari backed down. In November, speaking extemporaneously by video at a conference in New Delhi, Zardari declared that Pakistan might be willing to follow a policy of "no first use" of its nuclear weapons, a remarkable departure from past Pakistan Army doctrine. Privately, in discussions with Indian officials, Zardari affirmed his interest in picking up the back-channel negotiations. Some Indian officials and analysts interpreted Mumbai as a kind of warning from the I.S.I. to Zardari—"Zardari's Kargil," as some Indians put it, meaning that it was a deliberate effort by the Pakistan Army to disrupt Zardari's peace overtures. Several Pakistani and American officials told me that Zardari is now deeply worried about his personal security.

The regional headquarters of Jamaat-ud-Dawa—the educational and charitable organization that, depending on how you see it, is either the parent of or a front for Lashkar-e-Taiba—lies on a flat stretch of agricultural land west of Lahore, outside a village called Muridke. Barbed-wire fences surround a campus of about seventy-five acres, which contains an Olympic-size swimming pool, horse stables, offices, several schools, dormitories, and a large whitewashed mosque. When I visited, a smoky haze had shrouded the facility in a yellowish murk. The chief administrator, Mohammed Abbas, who is also known as Abu Ehsaan, greeted me. Abbas, who is thirty-five years old, has a substantial belly and a four-inch black beard. He showed me inside, to a carpeted room, where we sat cross-legged on the floor, propped against cushions.

The United States listed Jamaat-ud-Dawa—the name roughly translates as the Society of the Call to Islam—as a foreign terrorist organization in 2006, on the ground that it was an alias for Lashkar. After the Mumbai attack, the United Nations Security Council followed suit, with tacit support from Pakistan's civilian government. Abbas told me that these judgments were mistaken, and that Jamaat-ud-Dawa "is solely a relief organization."

He explained that young men often joined the organization as relief workers, and were sent out for a year or more to areas that had been struck by earthquakes or other disasters. These volunteers might also reside at Muridke, where they can receive lodging, food, and pocket money, he said. If they later marry or move into administration, they might qualify for a modest salary. Among the group's projects, he said, "We've set up an emergency cell for accidents on the G.T. Road"—the principal highway that traverses Pakistan. "People call us and we send the ambulance to the scene. We also work in collaboration with the local district administration. They're happy with our work. They think we're honest—they know that if we pick up victims they will get back all of their valuables when they are released from the hospital."

As we spoke, several full-bearded men spread a plastic mat atop the carpeting and laid out a meal of chicken biryani and naan. Abbas excused himself briefly to answer his cell phone; its ring tone was the sound of a frog croaking.

I asked Abbas if his organization had come under pressure from the government of Pakistan since the Mumbai attack. "The police came the night the organization was banned, but the schools and campus were already closed because of vacations," he said. "It is not clear yet whether the schools will be able to reopen. The hospital is functional, but people are afraid. The number of patients has declined because people are afraid India may hit this Muridke complex.

"No doubt we are afraid," he continued. "Hundreds of workers have been arrested and shifted to unknown places. Top leaders have been placed under house arrest. . . . If they come and they want to arrest me, I am ready. But what is the charge sheet? The U.S. should tell—the U.N. should tell—what Jamaat-ud-Dawa has done."

President Zardari announced that he would ban Jamaat, as required by the U.N. resolution. The Pakistani government plans to close Jamaat's schools and to place provincial administrators at each of the charity's facilities to oversee finances and personnel. However, Pakistan has a long record of implementing such crackdowns only partially, and of releasing jihadi leaders after relatively short periods—an approach to counterterrorism that is referred to in India as "catch and release." Pakistan banned Lashkar in 2002, for example, but its leader, Saeed, continued to preach openly. Indian officials point out that Jamaat's Web site continued to operate long after Pakistan had declared the latest ban, and they claim that Lashkar and Jamaat have now reorganized themselves under various new names.

Abbas took me on a walk around the campus. We chatted with a few young men who said that they were students at Jamaat's university. Lashkar educates thousands annually in a Wahhabi-influenced strain of Islam that, in addition to its political doctrine of transnational jihad, emphasizes austere personal devotion. (Pakistan's traditional religious culture has been influenced by the veneration of earthly Sufi saints.) Evangelizing students form the core of Lashkar's membership and its strength—like Hezbollah, the young men in Jamaat dormitories and "humanitarian" camps can offer social services and a vision of ethical governance in a country that enjoys a paucity of both.

Down a dirt road shaded by eucalyptus trees, we found Jamaat's hospital, where half a dozen villagers squatted on the pavement, waiting for appointments. Inside we toured a gynecological clinic and a dentist's office—the fee schedule posted on the wall indicated that a full dental exam would cost about fifty cents.

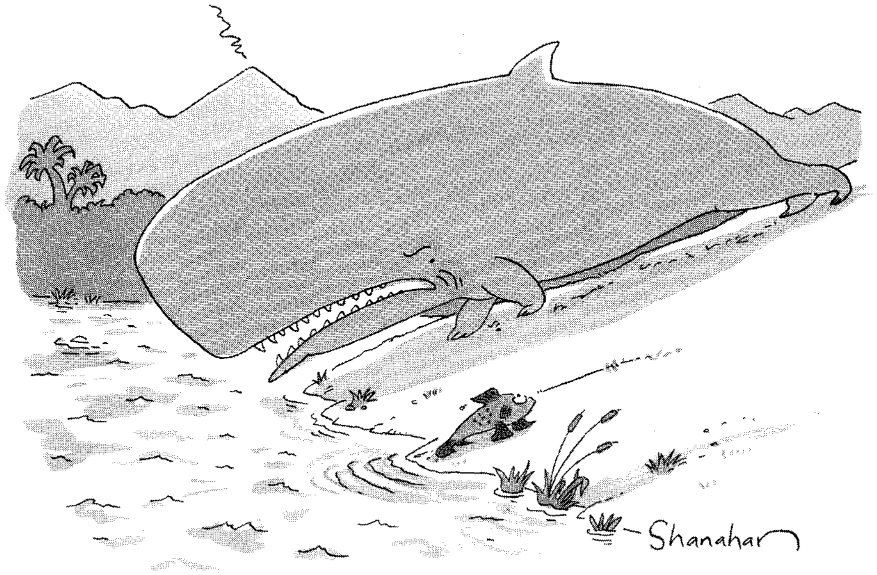
A blue police truck had parked in front of the headquarters building by the time we returned. "This happened all of a sudden," Abbas said unhappily. Had my presence been detected, and the police been dispatched to make a show of their vigilance, or was this a genuine inspection? We shook hands and said our farewells beside the police vehicle. On its side, stencilled in English in white block letters, were the words "Crime Forensic Laboratory."

A few minutes later, on the G.T. Road, headed back to Lahore, I passed some Urdu-language graffiti painted prominently in white on a brick wall. "Under the banner of preaching and jihad," the scrawl declared, "Lashkar's caravan will roll on."

Last December, during an appearance on "Meet the Press," Barack Obama remarked, "We can't continue to look at Afghanistan in isolation. We have to see it as part of a regional problem that includes Pakistan, includes India, includes Kashmir, includes Iran." The President has appointed the veteran diplomat Richard Holbrooke as a special representative for Pakistan and Afghanistan. The public description of Holbrooke's responsibilities has been carefully worded to avoid explicit mention of Kashmir, because India's government has long rejected outside mediation of that conflict, but, given his mission, Holbrooke will inevitably be drawn into quiet talks about the achievements and frustrations of the back channel.

The Indo-Pakistani equation is critical, in any event, to the outcome of the war in Afghanistan, which Obama has identified as one of his highest foreign-policy priorities. Stability in Afghanistan will be difficult to achieve unless Pakistan coöperates more wholeheartedly in American-led efforts to pacify the Taliban. The I.S.I. built up the Taliban as a national Afghan movement during the nineteen-nineties, partly as a means to prevent India from gaining influence in Afghanistan. Pakistan's generals are unlikely to dismantle the Taliban leadership if they continue to regard jihadi groups as a necessary instrument in an existential struggle with India. "As far as the Pakistan Army is concerned, they think India is trying to weaken Pakistan," Muhammad Nasir Akhtar, a retired three-star general, said. "They also think America is working with India to denuclearize Pakistan." This mind-set, he added, "is very dangerous for the future."

The Mumbai attack took place during the transition between the Bush and Obama Administrations, and the United States concentrated its diplomatic efforts on preventing any armed conflict between India and Pakistan. There were several close calls. Less than seventy-two hours after the attack began, someone pretending to be India's foreign minister telephoned Zardari and threatened war; only when former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice intervened did it become apparent that the call was a hoax. The caller has not been identified; like the Mumbai strike itself, the phony threat may have been a deliberate provo-



"It's all yours."

cation by jihadi-aligned conspirators.

The danger of open war between India and Pakistan has not passed. As recently as December 26th, Pakistani intelligence officials concluded that Indian warplanes were being positioned for an air raid. The country's national-security adviser at the time, Durrani, telephoned American officials in alarm. The next day, Stephen Hadley, then the national-security adviser, tracked down Durrani on his cell phone while he was shopping in an Islamabad supermarket and told him that there would be no raid.

During the Bush Administration, American and British officials monitored the secret negotiations. British officials contributed a few ideas based on their experience with the Good Friday agreement in Northern Ireland, but neither they nor the Americans became directly involved. Ultimately, any peace settlement between India and Pakistan would have to attract support in both countries' parliaments; if it were seen as a product of American or British meddling, its prospects would be dim. "One of the best pieces of advice we gave the State Department when I was in Delhi—and I remember writing about four cables on this subject—was to keep hands off," Ashley Tellis, a former political adviser in the U.S. Embassy in New Delhi, recalled. "We stayed away, and unless the Obama-ites choose to change this I doubt we will intervene. They've managed quite well without us—they've ended up in a place we'd like to see them end up." Direct negotiations, without mediators, had forced the two sides to confront the hard issues, the senior Indian official told me. "Ultimately, we need to screw up our courage and do the deal, and anybody else getting involved actually gives both of us a crutch," the official said. "We grandstand."

On the fundamental problem of the Pakistan Army's support for jihadi groups, however, only the United States has the leverage, through its military- and economic-assistance packages, to insist upon changes. Unless the Pakistan Army makes a true break with its jihadi clients—and comes to regard these groups as a greater threat than India—not even the most creative diplomats in the region are likely to succeed. "The time to act—to control the Pakistan Army and get the civilians together—is now," Brajesh Mishra, a former Indian national-security adviser, told me. "I have no doubt in my mind that unless the Pakistan Army is forced to do something about the jihadis it will lead to a military confrontation" with India, and perhaps very soon, he said.

Since November, India has employed a diplomatic and media campaign to induce the international community—the United States, in particular—to put greater pressure on the Pakistan Army to break its ties with jihadi groups. India and the United States have grown closer in recent years, but Indian officials still see the U.S. as far too willing to accept excuses from Pakistan's generals. "The Pakistanis have been able to play the Americans," C. Uday Bhaskar, a retired Indian Navy commodore, said. "I wouldn't abandon them—that would only make the problem worse. . . . The Pakistan Army will have to self-correct. That is the only way—short of total war."

In the face of Indian complaints, American officials have sometimes taken a protective posture toward the I.S.I. and the Pakistan Army. Pakistan's generals have become adept at pursuing both peace talks and covert war simultaneously, and at telling American interlocutors what they wish to hear. After September 11th, in particular, the Bush Administration did little to challenge the dualities in Pakistan's policies. Bush's counter-terrorism advisers decided that Kashmir-focussed jihadi groups posed no direct threat to the U.S. The Administration delivered close to ten billion dollars' worth of military aid to Pakistan, ostensibly to fight Al Qaeda, without real oversight and without requiring that the I.S.I. break with regional Islamist groups. "On Al Qaeda, there was nothing we asked them to do that they wouldn't do," Bob Grenier, who was the C.I.A.'s station chief in Islamabad during 2001 and 2002, recalled. As for groups such as Lashkar, "There was a tremendous amount of ambivalence." I.S.I. leaders seemed "concerned about backlash" if they cracked down too hard on the Kashmir groups, Grenier said.

Last fall, General David Petraeus, a specialist in counter-insurgency doctrine, was promoted to head the United States Central Command, which oversees American military operations and policies in the Middle East, and in Afghanistan and Pakistan. (India falls under the Pacific Command, thereby complicating efforts to coördinate U.S. military liaisons in the region.) Petraeus has organized a group of about two hundred government, academic, and military specialists to rethink U.S. strategy in his area of responsibility. Their study has highlighted the importance of changing the strategic outlook of Pakistani generals toward India, according to military officers involved in the review. Already, Petraeus has started to expound his "big idea" about U.S. military strategy toward Pakistan: that the Pakistan Army must be convinced that it faces no existential threat from India but does face a revolutionary threat from jihadis within its borders—and so should shift its emphasis from planning and equipping itself for war with India to eliminating homegrown jihadis.

Admiral Mike Mullen became chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in October, 2007, and since then he has held eight meetings with the Pakistan Army chief, General Ashfaq Kayani, as well as three or four meetings with General Ahmad Pasha, who was appointed by Kayani to lead the I.S.I. last autumn. Kayani participated in the back-channel talks while serving as Musharraf's I.S.I. chief; in that role, he endorsed the principles in the non-paper. Both Pakistani commanders have promised a new strategic direction. In January, Pasha told *Der Spiegel*, "We are distancing ourselves from conflict with India, both now and in general." He added, "We may be crazy in Pakistan, but not completely out of our minds. We know full well that terror is our enemy, not India." Mullen told me that he has heard the same from Kayani and Pasha in private. Their shift in outlook "has been transformational," Mullen said. The Pakistan Army is "certainly committed," and yet, Mullen said, "It's going to take a while, and it's an urgent, urgent situation, where lives are at stake."

The Obama Administration has initiated a sixty-day review of policy toward Pakistan and Afghanistan; as it completes that study, the Administration will have to decide how much patience with the Pakistan Army it can afford. The most difficult challenge will be finding the right blend of encouragement and pressure to induce the Pakistan Army and the I.S.I. to conclude that an overarching and long-lasting regional peace is in their interest. Not all American officials possess even Mullen's qualified optimism. "History shows that the Pakistanis will slow-roll us to death," a senior U.S. intelligence official told me, referring to Pakistan's long record of tolerance for jihadi groups. "The history is so compelling—that the Pakistanis play around and nothing ever changes."

THE OLDER I GET, THE FASTER TIME SEEMS TO PASS. THAT'S JUST ONE MORE SIDE EFFECT OF GLOBAL WARMING.
THREE-MARTINI SCIENCE
ZIEGLER

Zardari and Singh may not find it easy to return to the non-paper negotiations on Kashmir any time soon, even if they wish to. In Pakistan, civilian political leaders might well reject the earlier framework simply because the discredited Musharraf was behind it. Even more daunting, the violent contest for power and legitimacy between Taliban militants and Pakistan's government is in many ways a struggle over Pakistan's national identity—and, particularly, over whether the present government is righteously Islamic enough. In the midst of such a contest, any agreement that made concessions to India would be harder than ever to sell to the Pakistani public. "The military is completely on board at the top levels—with a paradigm shift, to see India as an opportunity, to change domestic attitudes," a senior Pakistani official told me. However, he continued, "The public mood is out of synch." The mood within sections of the Army and the I.S.I. may be out of synch with peace negotiations as well; in early February, the Kashmiri jihadi group Hezb-ul-Mujahideen hosted a public conference in Muzaffarabad, which Lashkar supporters attended.

In India, Manmohan Singh seems determined to seek reëlection on a peace-and-stability platform. Last year, before Mumbai, Singh took steps to reconnect the back channel with Tariq Aziz, according to people familiar with the diplomacy. Singh was concerned, in particular, about whether Zardari would be willing to continue the talks and whether Pakistan would stand by the non-paper, or insist on renegotiating.

Pervez Musharraf arrived in the United States in January for a speaking tour. It was not a particularly high-profile itinerary; he spoke first to the World Affairs Council of Western Michigan, and later at Stanford University and the World Affairs Council of Philadelphia. On his last evening in the country, he attended a reception hosted by the Middle East Institute, a public-policy group with headquarters in an Edwardian row house near Dupont Circle, in Washington, D.C. Two men with crewcuts and earpieces stood outside the door; a private security guard with a metal detector checked the guests. Several dozen people sipped red wine in a high-ceilinged room: former American Ambassadors to Pakistan, lobbyists, and representatives of some of the defense contractors who did big business in the Musharraf era, such as Lockheed Martin, Raytheon, and Northrop Grumman. The guest of honor turned up about five minutes late, in a black S.U.V. with flashing emergency lights.

Musharraf looked well, in a tailored dark suit and red tie. He circulated among the crowd and engaged in small talk about the weather, inflected with nostalgia from his time in office—yes, Michigan was very cold, but nothing like the time he stepped onto an airport tarmac in Kazakhstan, when the temperature was minus thirty-six degrees. I asked him about the almost-deal he had made on Kashmir in 2007. I said that I had been surprised to discover how close his negotiators had been to drawing to an end one of the great territorial conflicts of the age.

"I've always believed in peace between India and Pakistan," he replied. "But it required boldness on both sides. . . . What I find lacking sometimes is this boldness—particularly on the Indian side." He then reviewed a long negotiating session he had had, many years before, with former Indian Prime Minister Vajpayee, in which the pair had tried and failed to agree on a particular joint statement. As he recounted the incident, the pitch of Musharraf's voice rose slightly; he seemed to be reliving his frustration.

He returned to the subject of the 2007 talks. "I wasn't just giving concessions—I was taking from India as well," he said, a touch defensively. Then he calmed. He fixed his gaze and added, "It would have benefitted both India and Pakistan." ♦

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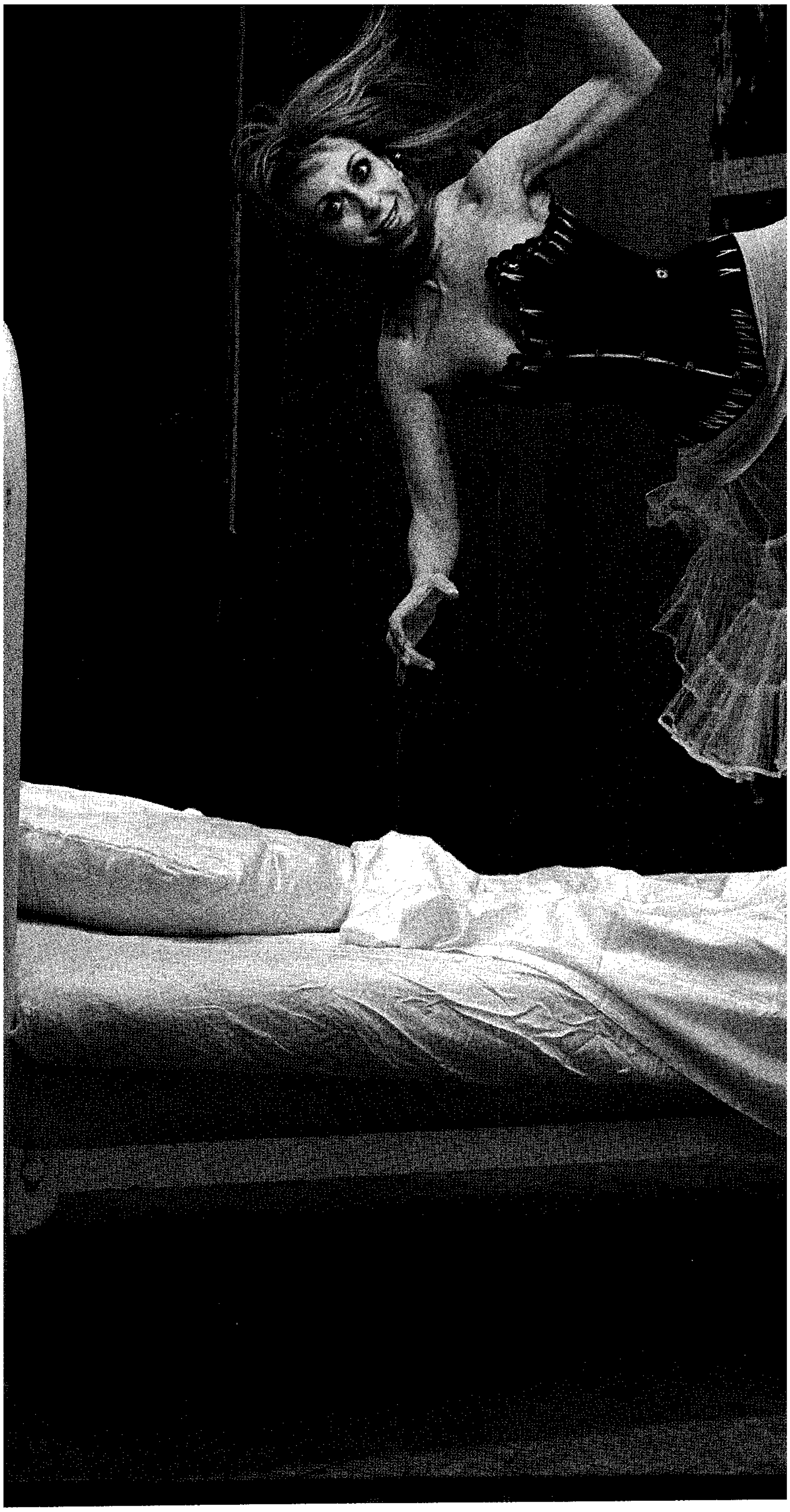
Think Tank, Steve Coll's blog.

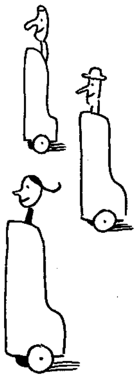


nd really act at the same time," Dessay says. "Acting is receiving, and singing is givi

Natalie Dessay, the soprano, descended a staircase into the rehearsal room at the Metropolitan Opera with the poise of a countess entering a ballroom, dressed in skinny black pants, high heels, and a belted black jacket, her eyes shielded by enormous sunglasses of the sort favored by Paris Hilton. A bright-orange handbag swung from the crook of her arm, and she held a cell phone to her ear. She seemed irritated by the words of her interlocutor—her agent in France, perhaps. She also seemed largely oblivious of the ministrations of a pair of company operatives who had rushed to disencumber her and were removing jacket, scarf, and—as Dessay carelessly extended each limp, queenly hand—an imaginary pair of gloves.

It was the first afternoon of rehearsals for Bellini's "La Sonnambula," in which Dessay is to appear at the Met, in March and April. To compensate for the opera's famously silly and thin libretto—a woman who is about to be married sleepwalks into the room of a man who is not her intended; scandal ensues; her doubting groom discovers her sleepwalking again; her honor is restored—the director, Mary Zimmerman, had given the production a playful conceit. Zimmerman's singers would appear as members of an opera company rehearsing a production of "La Sonnambula," with Dessay playing an adored, self-absorbed soprano cast as Amina, the sleepwalker of the title. At the outset of the opera, the set would be a mock rehearsal room (coffee machine, water dispenser, a chalkboard reading "Act I, Scene 1") and the cast would show up onstage wearing street clothes. In the case of Dessay, who is tiny and has the build and carriage of a dancer, this meant stretchy pants, a yoga top from Lululemon, and—forthcoming—an elegant pair of gloves.

Dessay is known for her unusual commitment to exploring the theatrical possibilities offered by opera, and she was more than happy to improvise and experiment. She delivered her first aria while trying on shoes, tossing several pairs aside before settling on black high-heeled boots, in which she hopped and twirled for a moment, showily testing them for comfort. A trolley cluttered with plastic-foam heads, bald for the purposes of rehearsal but ultimately to be equipped with wigs, was wheeled in for her perusal; Dessay cast a weary eye upon them, carelessly rummaged through them, and held one up—like a Hamlet contemplating the skull of Yorick—before tossing it aside in disdain. "La Sonnambula" is rarely played for humor, but Dessay was finding a new way into the work, and Zimmerman bounced on the balls of her feet in apparent delight, offering her celebrated star only the gentlest of guidance as to how to play a celebrated star. "Don't get too imperious," Zimmerman said. "You're just spoiled. Just thoughtless."



Dessay was entirely persuasive in the role of a self-regarding diva rehearsing a notoriously demanding role—"La Sonnambula" is infrequently performed, in part because of its plot and in part because it is technically so difficult—except that she couldn't actually sing. A week earlier, after concluding a short run of "Pelléas et Mélisande," by Debussy, at the Theater an der Wien, in Vienna, she'd been struck with laryngitis. While she could still speak—her conversational voice, surprisingly low, was only slightly husky—she could not use her operatic voice, which is prodigiously high and supple. Dessay was marking the notes: singing them in a tuneful but subdued near-whisper, an octave lower than they would be heard in performance. A spectator unfamiliar with Dessay's capabilities might have taken her not for an opera singer who can act but for an actor with a surprisingly pretty little voice—a voice that, given some training, might really turn into something.

Dessay says that it is her highest artistic ambition to embody a character so persuasively, and tell a story so convincingly, that the audience forgets that she is singing. "What is interesting is to have this incredible, unbelievable way of expressing ourselves vocally paired with a total controlled and quiet body," she says. This is, she admits, very hard to achieve, not only because of the implausibility of many opera plots but also because of the physical demands of the art. "It's almost impossible to sing and really act at the same time," she says. "For me, acting is receiving, and singing is giving, and that is why it is so difficult, because your body does one thing and your mind does another."

Some of the most successful singers in the history of opera refrained from acting entirely—Pavarotti was most convincing as himself—but among the greatest of singers there have also been formidable actors and actresses, and Dessay, who calls herself a "singing actor," is the performer who best represents that tradition today. David Gockley, the general director of the San Francisco Opera, said, "She is extraordinarily demanding on herself, and her colleagues. That is what made Callas an extraordinary experience compared with Tebaldi, who was regal and stately and uninvolved dramatically. That's good enough for some people—to hear the world's most beautiful voice. But Callas was this character who was interesting on many different levels, certainly mythically, and she brought everyone in the cast up a notch. And I would say that of Natalie."

Dessay will be in New York for two months this spring for "La Sonnambula," staying at an apartment on the West Side, which she bought a little more than a year ago. (Upon arriving at her pied-à-terre the day before rehearsals began, she spent three hours cleaning it, a chore that Zimmerman's imagined diva would surely have delegated.) But whenever possible Dessay is in a suburb with a sleepy main street, half an hour outside Paris—like Pelham but with better pâtisserie—where she lives with her husband, Laurent Naouri, a baritone, and their thirteen-year-old son and ten-year-old daughter.

"I live here because I couldn't afford *this* in Paris," Dessay told me when I visited her there in January, and by *this* she meant her house, a former hunting lodge, set in a walled garden, which was designed by Jules Corboz, who made the famed chandelier at the Palais Garnier opera house, in Paris. Her living room has a coffered ceiling, elaborate moldings, and tapestries depicting the chase, but Dessay's way of life is less grandiose. The couches are comfortably worn and draped with throws in a manner familiar to anyone obliged to share space with children. She lives without the perquisites of fame enjoyed by pop divas: she has no personal assistant, no personal trainer, no live-in housekeeper. On the day I was to visit her home—she had flown back for thirty-six hours between performances in Vienna—she called to apologize for running late; she had to take two of her cats, Polyp and Nodule, to the vet.

Dessay, who is forty-three, has expressive green eyes and an archly intelligent mien. She is both modestly self-deprecating and genuinely self-doubting. "It is very bizarre—I sometimes have a superiority complex and an inferiority complex at the same time," she says. Naturally dark, she is currently a blonde. "I changed last summer, don't ask why," she told me. "It was one of those summers when I hated myself."

She has been married for fifteen years to Naouri, for whom she converted to Judaism. Dessay and Naouri try to insure that, their international engagements notwithstanding, one or the other of them is in Paris at any given time, which means that Naouri often has to fit his engagements around Dessay, because she is booked five years in advance. (She typically performs forty times a year.) Although they were both starring in "Pelléas et Mélisande" in Vienna, they rarely work together. When they do, it is sometimes to great effect, as in a 1997 production, in Lyons, of "Orpheus in the Underworld," in which Dessay played Eurydice and Naouri played Jupiter. In the "Fly Duet," Jupiter, in the guise of a fly, seduces Eurydice. Naouri told me, "It got very sexy, because, at her own suggestion, she would climax on a top E when I was going down on her. It's now on YouTube. Anyone can see it." Twenty-nine thousand people have, enjoying the spectacle of Naouri, in a bulbous insect costume, chasing Dessay, who—with her black bob, negligee, and fishnet stockings—bears a striking resemblance to Betty Boop, but with an even higher pitch.

Like many opera singers, Dessay nurtured no desire to sing operatically until she accidentally discovered that she could. "I sang for myself under the shower, like everyone else," she said. "I did know that I could sing in tune, that is all." She was raised in Bordeaux, where her father was an engineer and her mother a housewife. She recalled, "Maybe it's a legend I tell myself now, but I have the impression that since I was five years old I wanted to be onstage, first as a dancer and then as an actress, and then as a singer. Probably I wanted to be heard. I remember a phrase that my mother kept telling me when I was a child: 'Stop with your piercing voice'—*la voix perçante,* which is a very high and unpleasant voice."

She studied ballet, but realized in her teens that she would never be good enough to dance professionally. "I didn't have flexibility, *cou de pied, en dehors,* everything," she says. "It was the first great disappointment of my life." After high school, she went to college to study German, but found it dull; she enrolled instead in a theatre program at the conservatory in Bordeaux. In her second year there, at the age of twenty, she was required to sing in a theatre workshop. Although she had no great familiarity with opera—her exposure was limited to the few recordings of Maria Callas, Montserrat Caballé, and Kiri Te Kanawa that her parents owned, and to the occasional school outing to the local opera theatre, where she once slept through a production of "Tristan und Isolde"—she decided that her character, a French noblewoman, would perform Pamina's aria from "The Magic Flute." "Everybody told me, 'But you have a nice voice! You should take lessons!'" she says.

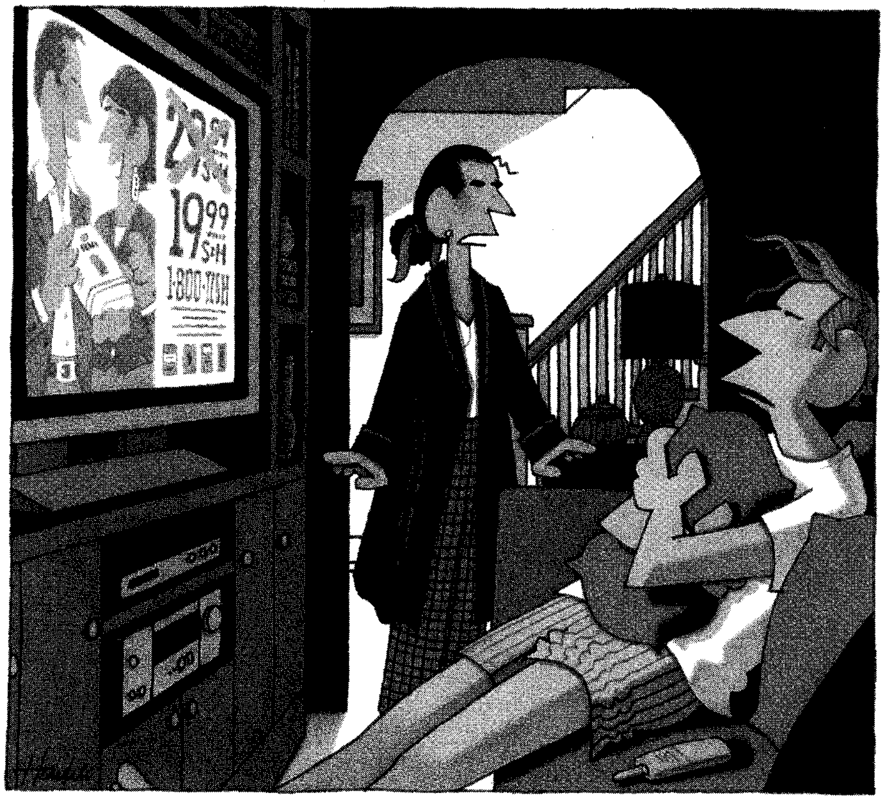
Within a year, she had dropped out of the theatre program and began studying voice. "When you are gifted for something, you want to improve, and it gives you courage to work hard, and that is what I was waiting for," she says. "To know where I was gifted, in order to have the courage to work." At first, her voice was flexible and high but small. "One of my teachers told me, 'You don't sing like an opera singer—you sing like a pop singer,'" she said. (She never had any interest in a pop career, though: "My natural voice is not interesting at all—it is nothing.") Opera training was boring and arduous. "You are learning how to produce the most beautiful sound with what you have in your throat, and because you can't control anything directly, your teacher has to explain through metaphor," she said. "'Think that your voice is a Ping-Pong ball on a fountain of water'; 'Think that you are beginning to yawn'; 'Think that you have a hot potato in your mouth.'"

Typically, it takes five years to train an operatic voice, and longer for it to mature. Dessay, however, started singing professionally after only a year, when she undertook an audition for the opera company in Toulouse—more, she says, as an exercise than in the expectation of being hired. "Right after the audition, someone ran up to me and said, 'Stay here—just *stay here.*' And I was asked to join the chorus." At first, she imagined a career as a member of an opera company. "But I realized it was not enough, and I wanted to be a soloist," she says. Naouri, who first met Dessay twenty years ago, when she was still a student, told me, "It was clear to me the first time I heard her that I was meeting one in thousands."

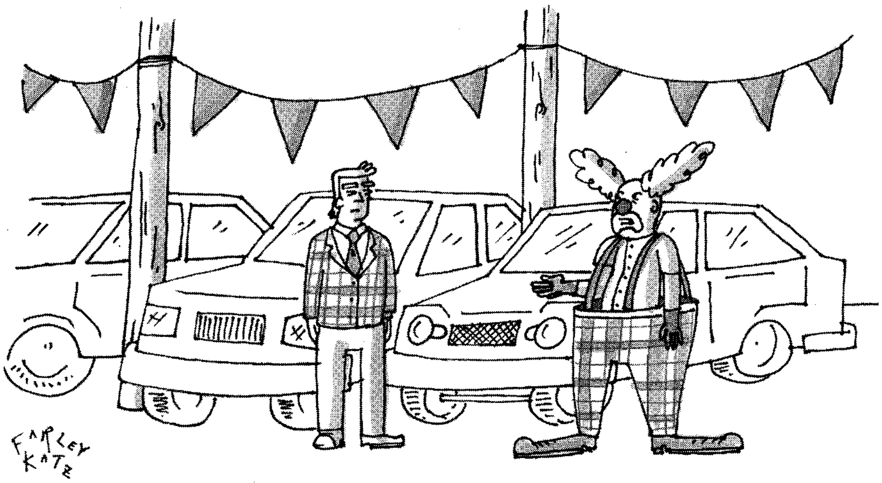
Dessay began to work with provincial opera companies, building a repertoire of roles that suited her creamy, silvery voice, which moved with great ease and could reach unusual heights—she could hit a top G, which is so unusual that it is rarely called for, even among coloratura sopranos. She developed her theatrical presence in addition to her vocal one. She recalled one of her first rehearsals—for "Le Roi l'a Dit," by Delibes, in Nantes. "I was so happy to be onstage, I couldn't just walk, I kept jumping around," she said. "The director said to me, 'Why are you jumping?' And I said, 'I'm not!' But I was. Thank goodness he told me."

When the Theater an der Wien was built, in 1801, by the impresario Emanuel Schikaneder—Mozart's sometime librettist—it was regarded as having the most up-to-date facilities in the world of opera. Recently, the theatre's managers have added four high-definition cameras, in an effort to extend opera's reach and relevance. Dessay loathes the unforgiving nature of high-definition—"When you are twenty, it's great," she says—but she recognizes its necessity, and on a rainy afternoon in Vienna, the day after a performance of "Pelléas et Mélisande," Dessay and Naouri were peering at a laptop in the office of Roland Geyer, the theatre's director, viewing video of the performance, in anticipation of its eventual release on DVD.

"Pelléas et Mélisande," a dreamlike work based upon a Symbolist dramatic text by Maurice Maeterlinck, is an oddity in Dessay's repertoire. More of a sung play than an opera, it is at the low end of her range. Not only was there no need to warm up before each performance; she actively had to avoid doing so, in order to keep her voice as low as it needed to be. The absence of spectacular coloratura and high notes was exactly why Dessay was eager to undertake the role. "Sometimes in opera, reaching a note can be enough, even if it's not enough for me," she says. "For the audience, most of the time, it's enough. Acting at the same time is much more difficult, because you have to reach places of your soul." Often enough, those places of the



"Come back to bed. You know sleep deprivation lowers your sales resistance."



"Do you have anything much smaller that can paradoxically hold many more people?"

• •

soul cannot be explored with much plausibility, but Dessay portrayed Mélisande—a mysterious young woman found wandering in the woods by Prince Golaud, who marries her only to have her fall in love with his younger brother, Pelléas—as melancholy and interior, her voice sometimes falling to a near-whisper. The lack of high notes came to feel like a form of self-abnegation, like Nureyev dancing a waltz.

Dessay, in black pants and a cashmere hoodie, leaned intently toward the screen, as if she were an athlete scrutinizing the previous day's game. "Oh, that's pretty," she said, as she watched herself jump down from a stepladder to the ground, her long gauzy skirt floating up around her calves. She asked to fast-forward to a scene in which she, as Mélisande aloft on a spiral staircase, is lifted down tenderly by her lover Pelléas, who was played by the young baritone Stéphane Degout. Dessay murmured with satisfaction at the effect. Less to her liking was the climactic scene in which Naouri, playing Golaud, Mélisande's jealous husband, kills Pelléas as Mélisande looks on. Dessay watched herself cowering at one side of the stage, her eyes wide in terror. She grimaced. "I'd have made a great silent-movie actress," she said, ruefully. "Lillian Gish—that's me." The tendency to overact is one against which she struggles. The night I saw "Pelléas et Mélisande," I could almost read the white-on-black text of implicit dialogue ("Unhand me, you beast!") as Dessay silently fought to free herself from a violent, jealous assault by Naouri—although, given that he was pulling her hair and shoving her to the ground, it seemed insensitive of Debussy to have given all the lines to Golaud.

"She is an extraordinary interpreter," says Laurent Pelly, the French theatrical director behind this production of "Pelléas et Mélisande," who also directed Dessay in a much lauded production of "La Fille du Régiment" that came to New York last spring, after runs at Covent Garden and the Vienna Staatsoper. Dessay was irresistible as Marie, the title character, usually played as a winsome maiden. "She's a girl raised by a regiment of soldiers," says Pelly, who explored this notion by putting Dessay in trousers and a singlet and having her play Marie as a tomboy unschooled in the ways of womanhood. Dessay, who showed comic timing worthy of Lucille Ball, also played Marie as literally unschooled: in a passage in which she was required to read a letter out loud, Dessay labored over every word, like a first grader in a school assembly. "It's great to hear people laugh, because you can't hear them cry," says Dessay, who, for the part, also had to switch between exquisite singing and comical squealing, which is much harder than she made it look. (Imagine Usain Bolt slowing down to slap his chest in celebration just fifty metres into his Olympic sprint victory, then revving back up to full speed to finish the race off.)

In "La Fille du Régiment," Dessay was paired with Juan Diego Flórez, the young Peruvian tenor, with whom she enjoyed a deliriously comical but genuine sexual chemistry, something not often witnessed on the stage of the Met. (The two will be reunited in the forthcoming "La Sonnambula.") Dessay insisted on verisimilitude there, too. "There was supposed to be a kiss," Flórez told me. "Opera singers usually fake it, but she said, 'You *have* to kiss me.' She knows that even if you do it very well it looks a little bit fake, and it has to be real. We had a very long kiss, because I had to hold her in my arms and sometimes there were two minutes of applause."

Theatricality has become the watchword of contemporary opera companies that are intent upon expanding their audience. Peter Gelb, who has made Dessay a mainstay of his program, with one guaranteed run a year, says, "She is the kind of performer that can bridge the gap between this old art form and a modern public." (Gelb, who recently announced that he and senior management have taken a ten-per-cent pay cut, owing, in part, to a thirty-per-cent drop in the value of the Met's endowment, has not asked Dessay to lower her rate of sixteen thousand dollars per performance.)

There are critics and opera lovers, though, who consider it an irritating diversion when singers insist on importing emotion through gesture or through off-score vocal excursions—such as the shattering scream, not notated by Donizetti, that Dessay delivered in the mad scene of "Lucia," when performing it at the Met in 2007, in a production by Zimmerman. Daniel Mendelsohn, in *The New York Review of Books*, wrote, "The scariness is already in the text, in the music. That Natalie Dessay and Mary Zimmerman thought that this scene needed the addition of 'real' scariness merely reveals the extent to which they neither comprehend nor trust the authors of the work they're staging."

"I totally disagree with that," Dessay says. "I think we are free to play it as we want. It's O.K. to scream, it's O.K. to whisper, to use every color you can and that you have in your voice, and to use your body until the last hair you have. Otherwise, it can be a concert. If it has to be perfect, let's do a recording, and let's not speak about theatre or interpretation."

For all her recent success in the United States, the kind of interpretations that interest Dessay are more typically produced in Europe, a fact that has kept her working consistently on the Continent. (So have the demands of motherhood, though she can sometimes go a couple of days without even talking to her children on the phone.) In the nineties, Dessay flourished in so-called *Regietheater*—"director's theatre," in which works from the canon are given an aggressive, contemporary, sometimes overtly political interpretation. In 2001, when the Salzburg Festival was being run by Gerard Mortier—the Belgian impresario who recently backed out of taking over the City Opera in New York—she appeared as Zerbinetta in a controversial production of Strauss's "Ariadne auf Naxos." She and the nymphs were cast as members of a post-punk rock band, and she performed an aria while standing atop a piece of furniture, stripping her clothes off. (Dessay's ability to sing while in motion, or running, or lying on the floor, is impressive, if not exactly singular. "A lot of people sing lying down these days in the opera," Sarah Billinghurst, an assistant manager partly responsible for casting at the Met, says. "Anna Netrebko sings a lot lying down, too. Many of these young divas are physically very agile, so when a director says, 'I think you should end up on the floor,' they are usually quite happy to do so.") Gelb says, "Natalie's great experiences in opera in Europe have been in these very strong, *Regie*-driven productions where she can be hanging from her foot, or being tortured—where she is really letting it hang out."

"At least it's alive," Dessay says of this more adventurous approach to opera. "And even if the productions aren't always good it's worth doing them, because people talk about them." The art form, she says, "is dusty, in a way. But it can be dusted. That's my mission." There are contemporary movie directors, she thinks, who should direct at the opera house: Baz Luhrmann, Pedro Almodóvar. "Tim Burton should do 'Tales of Hoffmann,'" she says. "I would like to do that with him."

But the very form of opera, she says, militates against the kind of plausibility that she attempts to bring to her roles. "It's difficult, because when you sing, it is already too much," she says. "It is really difficult to be believable when the first thing you have to do is fake." Dessay is like a would-be portrait painter who discovers that her real talent is for ceramics: her artistic inclinations chafe against the limitations of the art form at which she excels. "Because I didn't choose it—it chose me," she said. "I didn't want to be an opera singer."

Her desire for a career as a stage actress may soon be fulfilled: she hopes to star in Paris in a stage play by Thomas Bernhard. She has been trying for a decade to mount a production of the play, a farce about an opera singer who falls apart. "She sort of has a breakdown because she sings the Queen of the Night from 'The Magic Flute' the five hundredth time, and she can't anymore," says Dessay, who has sung the role perhaps seventy times herself. "She just wants to cancel everything. So it is something I know."

In 2001, Dessay was obliged to cancel several performances on account of a breakdown that was not mental but vocal. "Nothing was flexible anymore," she told me one evening in a café in Vienna, where she sought out a seat as far as possible from a table of smokers, and ordered green tea. "I was always straining, without having a cold or anything, and I could feel my voice when I was speaking. Normal people feel their voice when they don't have it anymore—that's the only way to feel your voice, in its absence. But to feel your voice when it does work is so bizarre."

That September, a cyst was discovered on one of her vocal cords, and she underwent surgery a few months later. "It's like having a sand grain on your voice," she says. "If you don't sing, it's O.K.—it's just a little unpleasant. But if you sing it's a catastrophe." Two years later, she underwent a second operation, to remove a polyp on the opposite cord.

Vocal-cord injury bears a stigma in the world of opera—it is wrongly thought to be caused invariably by improper technique, though problems can arise with the most technically proficient of singers. Dessay was advised by some of her friends to attribute her withdrawal to "personal reasons," as if being the subject of marital rumors were preferable to having a vocal problem. Dessay was, however, open about the cause of her absence from the stage. "It is just an accident—it can happen to anybody who trains a lot," she says of the injury. Her second surgery, in 2004, was even filmed for a documentary series about her, which was shown on French TV. (A doped-up Dessay mugs for the camera as she lies on a gurney, waiting to go into the operating room. "I'll have vocal-cord liposuction!" she says. "A cord face-lift!") Even more intimate than the shots of her throat under the knife are the scenes in which Dessay tearily laments her larger predicament: the incompatibility of her professional calling with the conduct of a normal home life, and her consequent attachment to the illness that jeopardizes her career. ("I almost wish I'd get sick again, to have some peace," she says.) It took her eight months before she was able to sing in public. "You don't speak for one week after the surgery, and then you can try to talk and you try to recover the confidence to sing," she told me. "The voice, you have it. But the confidence is gone. Some people only take three months to get over it, but I needed a lot of time, because I was totally destroyed. I was so afraid and traumatized."

Since having the surgery, Dessay has lost the highest of the notes that she was able to reach before—F, G, and A—though whether the loss is attributable to the disorder or just to the aging process is impossible to determine. In any case, she says, she had begun to change her repertoire before the surgeries, choosing roles for which a younger voice is less of a prerequisite. Unfortunately, such roles are also often less interesting. In 2006, in Santa Fe, she sang her first Pamina, the more-acted-upon-than-acting daughter of the imperious Queen of the Night in "The Magic Flute." Brad Woolbright, the artistic administrator of the Santa Fe Opera, says, "She was a fantastic Pamina, and she put her all into it, but she decided that it was going to be the one and only time she sang it. She said, 'It's O.K., but she's not that exciting a character.' " This summer at Santa Fe, she will be playing Violetta in "La Traviata," her first time in the role, which demands a larger, louder voice than anything else in her repertoire. "But that is the edge of my possibilities—that is the last edge," she told me. After that, she is not sure what other roles exist that might engage her. "The roles I have are the roles of a young girl—I don't have roles like old ladies, or witches," she says. "There are none for my kind of voice."

Not everyone agrees with this evaluation, including, unsurprisingly, the directors of the opera houses where she works. "She is right that she has to look for other roles, and there are other roles," Roland Geyer, of the Theater an der Wien, says. "For example, Despina in 'Così Fan Tutte' is supposed to be between forty and fifty years old. There are a lot of roles where being fifty could be ideal. But this is more a question of her own emotion. Every one of us—not only artists—wants to be younger." Peter Gelb says, "A singer cannot even begin to have the kind of vocal power to sing these roles on a big stage of an opera house like the Met until they are in their thirties, so they start off being cast much older than the roles they are playing. That is one of the conceits of grand opera."

Joan Sutherland sang the title roles of "Lucia di Lammermoor" and "La Fille du Régiment" at the Met when she was almost sixty, but Dessay is dismissive of the argument that opera singers have never been expected to stop singing the parts of maidens even as they push into mature matronhood. "Is it reasonable? Is it believable?" Dessay asked me in Paris, as she unloaded groceries in her kitchen and set about putting them away, although, on account of being away from home so much, she wasn't sure what went in which cabinet. "Is it nice? I don't think so."

Dessay has been urged by her management to perform concerts and recitals, which are lucrative and less demanding in terms of rehearsal, and are the late-career choice of many a successful singer. She contemplates the prospect with horror. "I hate concerts," she says. "I hate doing music just for music. I am not confident enough, and I am not used to doing that. I feel like a prisoner. What I like is being onstage with other people, and acting with them. Otherwise, I don't see the point."

There are still a few turns she would like to add to her repertoire, including playing all four female characters in Offenbach's "Tales of Hoffmann," a feat of endurance attempted by only a handful of the greatest singers, including Joan Sutherland and Beverly Sills. She is scheduled to do so in Barcelona and San Francisco, in 2013. Dessay and Roland Geyer have discussed a number of possible future productions, including an interpretation of Humperdinck's "Hansel and Gretel" in which the unfortunate brother and sister are, she says, "grown up, almost old." He also brought to her attention a work with which she was unfamiliar, a version of "Falstaff" by Salieri, which he suggested she might sing with a tenor who was new to her, Nikolai Schukoff. After she and Naouri had finished reviewing the video of "Pelléas" in Geyer's office, the director Googled Schukoff for Dessay's benefit, bringing up a picture of the handsome young Austrian in a production of Salieri's "La Grotta di Trofonio," shirtless and in briefs. "I'm delighted for her to do it—if I'm around," Naouri said.

The next evening, before the performance, a member of Geyer's staff went backstage and gave Dessay a copy of the score of the "Falstaff." During intermission, she paged though it, scanning the staves to see if the role rose to vocal heights sufficient to interest her. Clearly, playing a role like Mélisande was meant to be a rare departure. "There's nothing to sing here," she said of the Salieri, leafing swiftly through in pursuit of a challenging aria before studying the music in greater detail. On a first pass, at least, she didn't find much. "If I do something without high notes, everyone will say, 'Oh, she doesn't have high notes anymore.' You can do it once, but if you do it again and again they start to talk, and then the reputation is gone."

Mary Zimmerman, a theatre director who made her first significant foray into opera by directing Dessay as Lucia during the Met's 2007-08 season, says that her meta-operatic concept for "La Sonnambula" was directly inspired by Dessay. "I started out thinking very traditionally," Zimmerman told me at the Met, a few days before rehearsals of the new production were to begin. "It was going to be in a Swiss village. I went to a party with Natalie a couple of nights before the opening of 'Lucia,' and I said to her, 'I need to talk to you about "La Sonnambula."' She said, 'Whatever you do, don't set it in a Swiss village. You *can't* set it in a Swiss village.'" (The one aspect of the initial production idea that did interest Dessay, according to Zimmerman, was the inclusion of an ice-skating party: "She said, 'Oh, I will have to train!' and her eyes got big. But that didn't last long.") Zimmerman considered withdrawing from the production, but awoke a night or two later with her revised concept, which was sufficiently un-Swiss to pass muster with Dessay.

Zimmerman calls the opera "a parable about popularity," but says that her conception of the high-handed diva is not based on Dessay, or on any opera singer. "I am more thinking of 'I love Britney Spears!' 'I hate Britney Spears!' 'I love Britney Spears!'" she said. Operagoers may nonetheless be forgiven for suspecting that the interpretation is Zimmerman's gentle revenge upon Dessay, who was less than polite, both in public and in private, about the Met's "Lucia" production, calling Zimmerman inexperienced. ("She didn't know exactly what we need, and what we were waiting for from her, so it was a bit difficult," Dessay told Charlie Rose. "But we found a way. But I think she has to learn more how to direct singers.") Dessay thought that the staging was too conventional and, in particular, disliked her opening scene, in which she was positioned upon a heath, delivering an aria of exalted happiness. Zimmerman says that Dessay hated the scene, in part, because it required her to begin upstage, where she thought her voice would be diminished, rather than downstage, where a singer inevitably feels most secure. According to Dessay, though, the scene offered her nothing to work with dramatically. As audiences witnessed, she compensated by gambolling about the treacherously raked wood-and-plastic-foam heath, as if she were a highland deer. On opening night, she accidentally tumbled into a seated position, and completed her aria sitting down.

Peter Gelb, who helped to smooth things over between director and star, says, "Because Natalie is so interested in getting to the real underbelly, and soul, of roles which on the surface can be trite, she is very concerned about being in productions which are superficial or trite. I think she thought Mary's concept was too restrained and too traditional, whereas in fact I think that Mary's concept had that appearance but was much more dramatically viable and interesting."

Zimmerman told me that there were certainly times during the production of "Lucia" when she wanted to kill her bloody heroine—"and I am sure she wanted to kill me, too," she says. But their collaboration on "Sonnambula" seemed to be progressing without murderous impulses, and Zimmerman was unstinting in her praise of Dessay. "She is a showman," Zimmerman said. "She knows how to turn the whole auditorium on herself. There are moments in 'Lucia' where there just is such an act of unity in the room, and she stills the room so entirely that it becomes akin to a church." Zimmerman added, "My bottom line about Natalie is she's either proof that God exists or compensation that he doesn't." When I passed this evaluation along to Dessay over tea in an Upper West Side café after a rehearsal at the Met, she responded with laughter, but could not quite summon an equivalent compliment for her director.

Dessay considered withdrawing from "La Sonnambula" after the experience of "Lucia." "I was this close," she told me in Vienna, holding her finger and thumb an inch apart. "But then I thought, first, I have to earn my living. And, second, I thought that it was a challenge, for her and for me. And actually we get along together very well, because she is a nice and intelligent person, and I think she has good ideas. Peter Gelb told me she is brilliant, and Peter Gelb himself is brilliant, and so he wouldn't say that if it wasn't true."

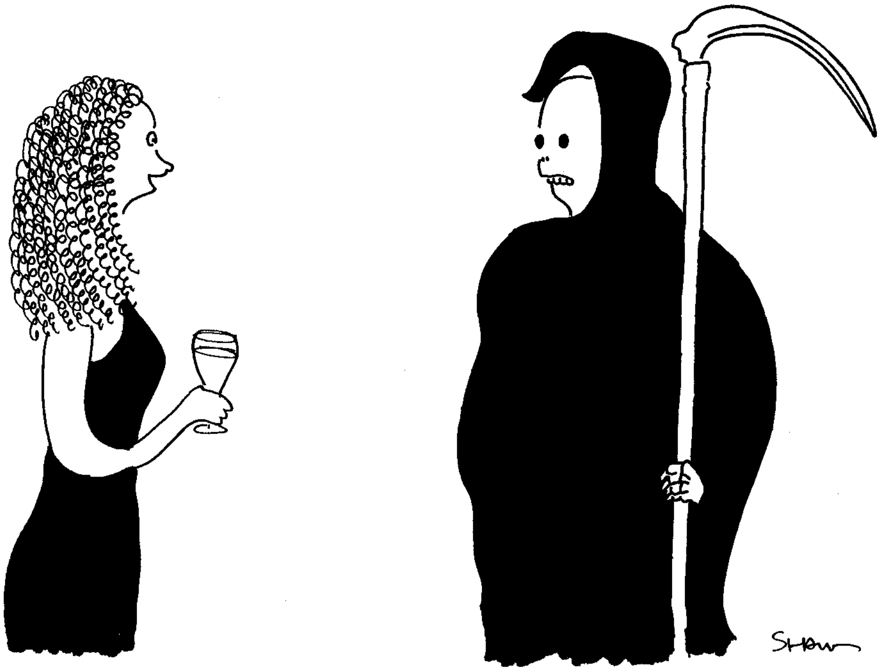
She was resolved to be open-minded about "Sonnambula," she told me before arriving in New York; and, once here, she certainly seemed to be committed to the endeavor, even if she was guarded in her appraisal of the postmodern frame that Zimmerman had given the production. "At the beginning, I felt that the concept didn't carry all the way through—it was just an idea to wrap it in beautiful paper. But after three weeks of rehearsals I think we are going to make it work." She went on, "It's an attempt to escape the convention, but it's very difficult, because we don't want to go against the music, which is so delicate and refined—we don't want to be an elephant in a porcelain shop, as we say in French." We were speaking after I had seen her rehearsing with members of the chorus, who were shunning her after her first sleepwalking escapade. (They responded by tearing up their scores, and otherwise trashing the mock rehearsal room.) "Mary told me the other day, 'We have a different approach to theatre. It's like a difference of religion,' " Dessay said. "So we have to respect each other, and live together, the way people who don't have the same religion do."

Last year, Dessay attempted another new role at the Met: as host of a high-definition broadcast, to be beamed live to movie theatres worldwide. She was required to introduce the opera—"the sad, horrible story of 'Peter Grimes,'" as she put it—and interview the star, the conductor, the director, and other participants. Dessay performed the unfamiliar role of on-camera interviewer with relish and wit, and this year she was asked for a reprise. She was to introduce the broadcast of a production of "Lucia" in which Anna Netrebko was playing the heroine. ("I should introduce it as the sad, horrible story of 'Lucia di Lammermoor,' " she joked.) A few days in advance of the broadcast, Dessay spent an evening at the Met when Netrebko was performing, for a test run of her own role.

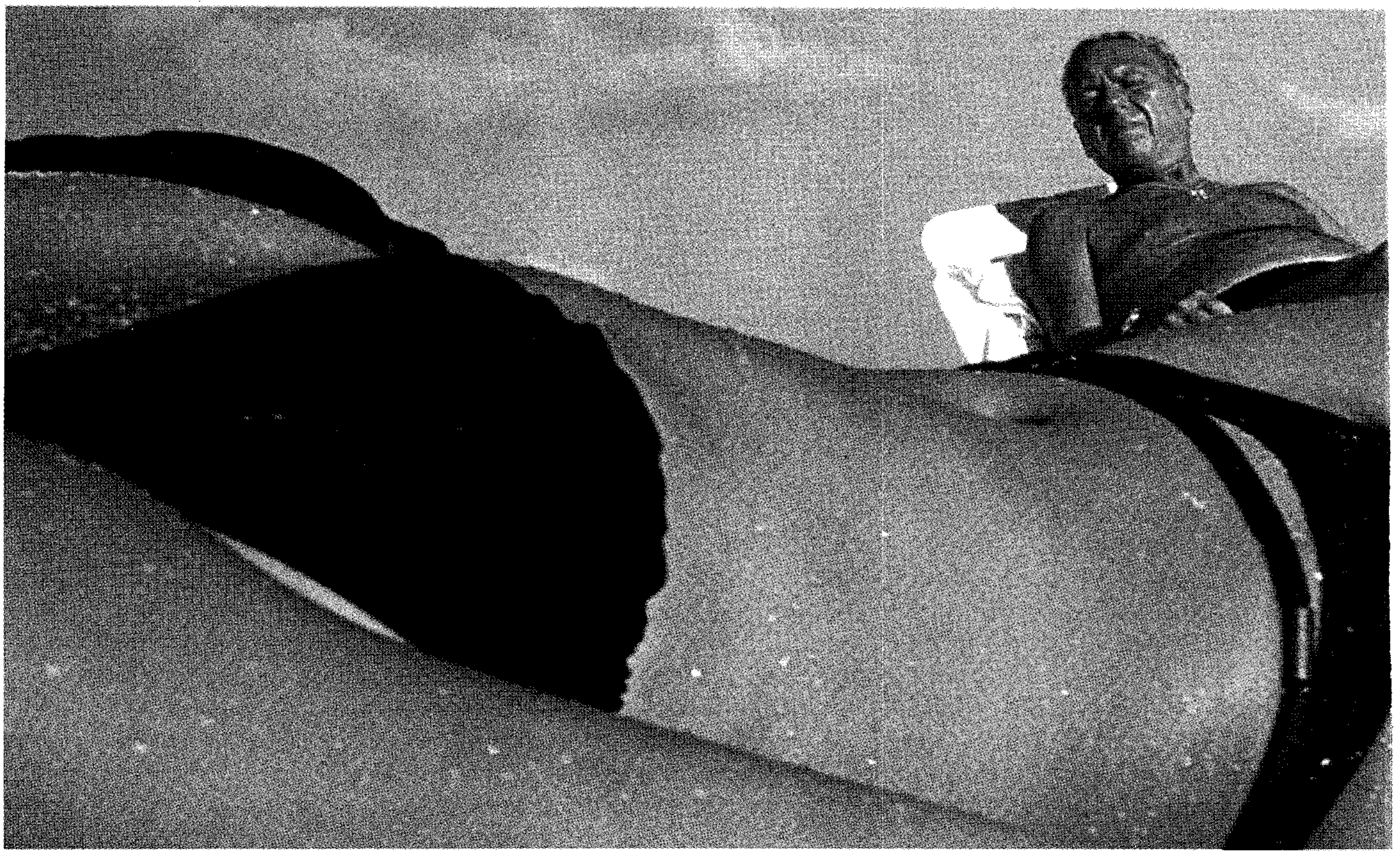
Half an hour before the curtain was to rise, Dessay was perched on a couch at the entrance to the dressing rooms; the cast and Met staff members congregate there during performances. Dressed in yoga clothes, she was scribbling on a script that had been provided for her, striking out questions and inserting new ones. Someone came and clipped a remote microphone pack onto the waistband of her pants, and it immediately fell off. "There's the proof I've never worn one!" she said. With minutes to go before the performance began, Dessay was met by her cameraman, sound technician, and other members of the production team, and was led from the dressing rooms to the wings, where she could walk onto a narrow strip of stage behind a scrim, remaining concealed from the settling audience's view. As Dessay crossed the stage from left to right, she encountered the hummocks of her despised heath and took up her old position. The orchestra, warming up in the pit, sounded as if it were just inches away. Choristers milled in the wings, waiting to make their entrance, and a pair of bloodhounds—animal extras—sniffed hotly around.

The camera rolled, and Dessay, with an animated smile, launched into her welcoming remarks. The muddled sound of the orchestra resolved into the regular bowing of strings that indicates the imminent start of the overture. "Maestro to the pit," a stage manager said into an intercom, and there was applause from the auditorium as, evidently, Marco Armiliato took his bow. Dessay was still talking to the camera as if doing the six o'clock news, unruffled by the mounting air of urgency among the crew. "Get off the stage!" someone shouted.

"And now Act I of 'Lucia di Lammermoor,' a victim of men and circumstance," Dessay said. The cameraman scuttled backward while she, with perfect poise, descended the heath as if there were nowhere she felt more at home, disappearing into the wings as the curtain rose. ♦



"You simply must meet my husband."



FICTION

BROTHER ON SUNDAY

BY A. M. HOMES

She is on the phone. He can see her reflection in the bathroom mirror, the headset wrapped around her ear as if she were an air-traffic controller or a Secret Service agent. "Are you sure?" she whispers. "I can't believe it. I don't want to believe it. If it's true, it's horrible. . . . Of course I don't know anything! If I knew something, I'd tell you. . . . No, he doesn't know anything, either. If he knew, he'd tell me. We vowed we wouldn't keep secrets." She pauses, listening for a moment. "Yes, of course, not a word."

"Tom," she calls. "Tom, are you ready?"

"In a minute," he says.

He examines himself in her makeup mirror. He raises his eyebrows, bares his teeth, smiles. And then he smiles again, harder, showing gum. He tilts his head, left and right, checking where the shadows fall. He turns on the light and flips the mirror to the magnifying side. A thin silver needle enters the reflection; there's a closeup of skin, the glistening tip of the needle, surrounded by a halo of light. He blinks. The needle goes in; his hand is steady on the syringe. He injects a little here, a little there; it's just a touchup, a filler-up. Later, when someone says, "You look great," he'll smile and his face will bend gently, but no lines will appear. "Doctor's orders," he'll say. He recaps the syringe, tucks it into his shirt pocket, flips the toilet seat up, and pees.

When he comes out of the bathroom, his wife, Sandy, is there, in the bedroom, waiting.

"Who was that on the phone?"

"Sara," she says.

"And?"

"The usual."

He waits, knowing that silence will prompt her to say more.

"Susie called Sara to say that she's worried Scott is having an affair."

"Scott?"

She nods.

He says, quite honestly, "Of all people, I wouldn't think Scott would be having an affair."

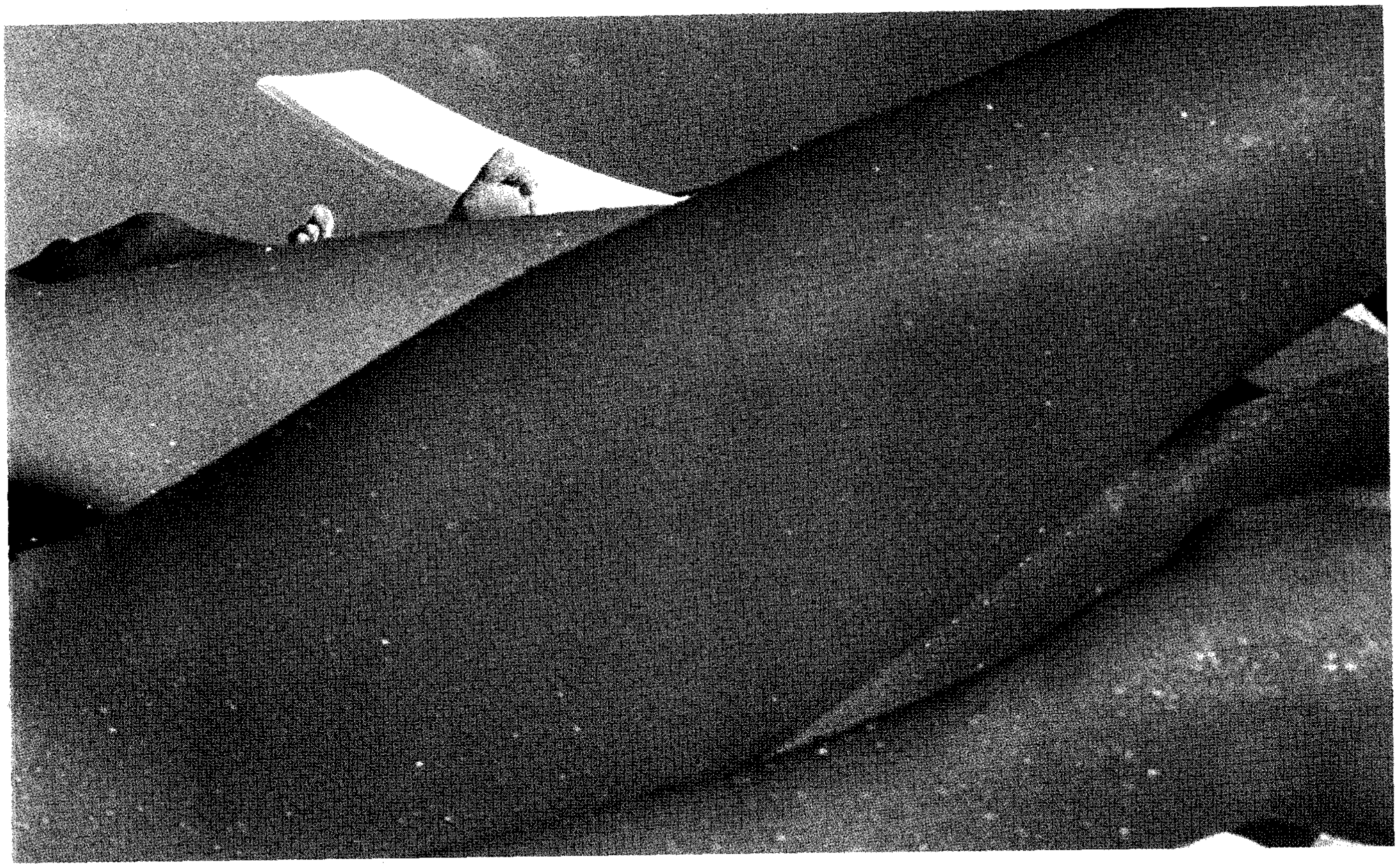
"She doesn't know that he's having an affair—she just suspects." Sandy puts her coverup into a tote bag and hands him his camera. "Can't leave without this," she says.

"Thanks," he says. "Are you ready to go?"

"Check my back," she says. "I felt something." She turns, lifting her blouse.

"You have a tick," he says, plucking it off her.

Somewhere in the summer house, a



ROBERT WHITMAN

loud buzzer goes off. "The towels are done," she says.

"Should we take wine?" he asks.

"I packed a bottle of champagne and some orange juice. It's Sunday, after all."

"My brother is coming, after all," he says. His brother, Roger, visits the beach once a year, like a tropical storm that changes everything.

"It's a beautiful day," she says. And she's right.

Tom sits in a low chair, facing the water, his feet buried in the sand. Just in front of him, hanging from the lifeguard stand, an American flag softly flutters. His sunglasses are his shield, his thick white lotion a kind of futuristic body armor that lets him imagine he is invisible. He believes that on the beach you are allowed to stare, as though you were looking not *at* the person but *through* the person, past the person at the water, past the water to the horizon, past the horizon into infinity.

He is seeing things that he would otherwise not allow himself to see. He is staring. He is in awe, mesmerized by the body, by the grace and lack of grace. He takes pictures—"studies," he calls them. It's his habit, his hobby. What is he looking for? What is he thinking while he does this? This is something that he asks himself, noting that he often thinks of himself in the third person—a dispassionate observer.

The beach fills up, towels are unrolled, umbrellas unfurl like party decorations, and, as the heat builds, bodies are slowly unwrapped. He, of all people, knows what's real and what's not. There are those who have starved the flesh off their bones, and those who have had it surgically removed or relocated. Each person wears it differently—the dimpling on the thighs, the love handles, the inevitable sag. He can't help noticing.

Around him, his friends talk. He's not listening carefully enough to register exactly who is saying what—just the general impression, the flow. "Did you have the fish last night? I made a fish. We bought a fish. His brother loves to fish. I bought a necklace. We bought a house. I bought another watch. He's thinking of getting a new car. Didn't you just get one last year? I want to renovate. Your house is so beautiful. His wife used to be so beautiful. Do you remember her? Could never forget. Tom went out with her once."

"Just once?"

"He doesn't have the best social skills," his wife says.

Now they are talking about him. He knows he should defend himself. He lowers the camera and turns toward them.

"Why do you always say that?"

"Because it's true," Sandy says.

"It may be, but that's not why I only went out with her once."

"Why didn't you date her again?" she wants to know.

"Because I met you," he says, raising the camera like a punctuation mark.

The intensity of the sunlight is such that he has to squint in order to see, and at times he can't see at all—there is a blinding abundance of light and reflection. He thinks of a blind girl who lived in his neighborhood when he was growing up: Audra Stevenson. She was smart and very pretty. She wore dark glasses and tapped her way down the sidewalk with her cane, a thick white bulb on the end of it. He used to watch her go down the street and wonder if she wore her glasses at home. He wondered what her eyes looked like. Perhaps they were very sensitive; perhaps she over-saw—that's how he thought of it. Maybe she wasn't blind in the sense of everything's being black but blind in that there was too much light, so that everything was overexposed and turned a milky white with only spots of color punching through—a red shirt, a brown branch, the grayish shadows of people. He asked her out once. He stopped her on the street and introduced himself.

"I know who you are," she said. "You're the boy who watches me go home."

"How do you know that?" he asked.

"I'm blind," she said, "not dumb."

He picked her up at her house, hooked his elbow through hers, and led her to the movie theatre. During the film, he whispered in her ear, an ongoing narration of the action, until finally she said, "Sh-h-h. I can't hear what they're saying if you keep talking to me."

After the date, Roger, who was two years older, made fun of him for being too shy to ask a "regular girl" out, and, no doubt, for going on a date long before Roger himself ever would. No girl was good enough for Roger: Rita's eyebrows were too thick, Sara's chin too long, Molly's eyes too wide, Ruthie's laugh too high-pitched. Every girl was just one twist of the genetic helix away from having a syndrome of some sort. Roger mocked "Tom the younger," as he liked to call him, loudly, as Audra was walking away, and Tom was so mortified, so sure that Audra had heard every word, that he never spoke to her again.

Behind him, they are still talking. "Arctic char. Orata. Sea bream, Chilean sea bass, swordfish, Ahi tuna. Mole sauce, ancho chili, a rub, a marinade, a pesto, a ragout, a teriyaki reduction." They love to talk about food and exercise—running, biking, tennis, Pilates, trainers, workouts, cleansing diets. The one thing they don't talk much about anymore is sex; the ones who are having it can't imagine not having it, and the ones who aren't having it remember all too well when they were the ones having it and saying they couldn't imagine not having it. So it has become off limits. Also not discussed is the fact that some of them are having sex with one another's spouses—i.e., hiding in plain sight.

He is only half listening, thinking about how life changes. If he met these people now, he's not sure he would be their friend, not sure he would have dinner with them every Saturday night, play tennis with them every Sunday, vacation with them twice a year, see the movies they see, eat at the places they eat at, do whatever it is that they all do together just because they're a kind of club—all while worrying about what will happen if he strays, if he does something other than what they expect of him, and he doesn't mean sex, he means something more. He looks at his friends; their wives all wear the same watches, like tribal decorations, trinkets of their status. The gold glints in the sun.

He is looking at them as they absently sift sand with their hands, and imagining them as children in cotton hats, pouring sand from one bucket to another as their parents talk over and around them. He is thinking of their parents, now either dead or single in their eighties or attended by new "companions" they met in physical therapy or on Elderhostel vacations. He looks at his friends and wonders what they will be like if they make it to eighty. The men seem oblivious of the inevitability of aging, oblivious of the fact that they are no longer thirty, of the fact that they are not superheroes with special powers. He thinks of the night, a year ago, when they were all at a local restaurant and one of them went to grab something from the car. He ran across the street as though he thought he glowed in the dark. But he didn't. The driver of an oncoming car didn't see him. He flew up and over it. And, when someone came into the restaurant to call the police, Tom went out, not because he was thinking of his friend but because he was curious, always curious. Once outside, realizing what had happened, he ran to his friend and tried to help, but there was nothing to be done. The next day, driving by the spot, he saw one of his friend's shoes—they had each bought a pair of the same kind the summer before—suspended from a tree.

"What time is Roger coming?" someone asks.

"Not sure," he says.

A friend's wife leans over and shows him a red dot, buried between her breasts.

"What do you think this is?"

"Bug bite," he says.

"Not skin cancer?"

"Not cancer," he says.

"Not infected?"

"Bug bite," he says.

"And what about this?" She shows him something else, as though hoping for bonus points. This spot is on what his father jokingly used to call "the tenderloin," her inner thigh.

"Isn't it funny that your father was a butcher and you're in the business of dealing with human meat?" another of the friends asks.

"It's all flesh and blood," he says, pressing the spot with his finger. "Pimple."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes."

"Not skin cancer."

"No."

"Does it look infected?"

"If you leave it alone, it'll be fine," he says.

He is forever being asked to step into the spare bedroom, the bathroom, the kitchen, even the walk-in closet, because someone wants to show him something. It's as though they were pulling him aside to make a confession. Mostly the answer is easy. Mostly whatever it is is nothing. But every now and then he's surprised; they show him something that catches him off guard. "How'd you get that?" he asks.

"You don't want to know," they say.

But, of course, in the end they tell him more than he wants to know.

"Was your father really a butcher?" the visiting sister of one of the friends asks.

"Yep. And he really talked about women's bodies like they were cuts of meat. 'Boy, she's got good veal cheeks! That girl would make one hell of a standing rib roast, trussed, bound, and stuffed.' And then he'd laugh in a weird way. My mother thought of herself as an artist. She signed up for a life-drawing class when I was eleven and she took me with her, because she thought I'd appreciate it. I just sat there, not knowing where to look. Finally, the instructor said, 'Draw with us.' I'd never seen a bare breast before—drawing it was like touching it. I drew that breast again and again. And then I glanced at my mother's easel and saw that she'd drawn everything but the woman. She'd drawn the table with the vase, the flowers, the window in the background, the drapes, but not the model. The instructor asked her, 'Where's the girl?' 'I prefer a still-life,' my mother said. 'But my son, on the other hand, look how beautiful he thinks she is!' "

"Was she being mean?"

He shrugs.

"She shouldn't have taken you to the class," Sandy says. "She was teasing you."

"I thought maybe I'd take Roger out on the boat this afternoon," one of the friends says. "Sound like fun?"

"Only if you capsize," he says, cryptically.

The friend laughs, knowing that he isn't kidding.

Ahead of him on the beach, a boy is spreading lotion on an older woman. He imagines the viscous feel of lotion warm from the sun, gliding over her skin—friction. He imagines the boy painting the woman with lotion, and then using his fingernail to write his initials on her back. He thinks of a time in St. Bart's, when Sandy was lying nude on the beach while he painted, and he picked up his brush and began making swirls on her skin. He painted her body and then he photographed her walking away from him into the water. In the sea, the paint ran down her skin in beautiful streaks of color. Later, one of the friends, the one with the boat, confessed, "I got hard just watching."

"You should try it sometime," he said. "With *your* wife."

"Oh, we did, that night, but I didn't have any paint. All I could find was a ballpoint pen. It wasn't the same."

"Drink?" Sandy asks, snapping him back into the moment.

"Sure," he says. She pours a combination of orange juice and champagne into a plastic cup and leans toward him. He can smell her, her perfume, the salty beach. As he takes the drink, it splashes up out of the cup and onto his arm. He licks it, his tongue tickled by the carbonation, the flavor of citrus, of wine, mixed with salt and sweat. He thinks that it's strange he can't remember ever having tasted himself before. His tongue rakes the fur on his forearm and picks up a tinge of blood from a scrape this morning. The flavor is good, full of life.

"Is Roger still with that woman?" one of the wives asks.

"His hygienist?" he asks.

"Is that who it was?" the friend asks.

"Yep, he left his wife to fuck the hygienist."

"And he's still with her," Sandy says.

"She must rinse and spit. I assume she doesn't swallow," he says.

"Stop, you're being crude."

He wonders when Roger is coming. On the one hand, he's dreading his arrival; on the other, he's starting to think it's rude that Roger's not there yet and hasn't called to say he's running late.

Tom closes his eyes. The sun is high. He feels it baking him, and then, suddenly, a shadow, like a cloud, crosses over him. He shivers. One of the women, Terri, is standing in front of him, holding out a plate of muffins. "High-protein, high-fibre. Take one." She had breast cancer a year ago—a mastectomy—and, six weeks later, they were all on their annual St. Bart's adventure. When everyone went to the beach, she stayed in the house. They all talked about her behind her back, worrying that they were doing something that made her uncomfortable. Then, on the third day, just before lunch, she walked out onto the beach and stood before them. He took a picture. She unbuttoned her blouse. He took another picture. Her husband started to get up, to stop her, but one of the women grabbed his arm, holding him back. Terri unbuttoned her blouse and opened it, revealing the remaining breast and the red rope of a scar. *Click, click, click.* He shot her again and again. In the end, what was amazing about the images was not the scar but her expression—terrified, defiant, vulnerable, her face in a dance of emotion, frame by frame. He gave her a set of prints—it was one of the rare times that he was the one to take someone aside, into his study. When she opened the package, she wept. "For a million reasons," she said. "For what was lost, for what remains, for how you saw what no one else did—they were all too busy looking at my boob."

"A meal in a muffin," he says, biting it. "It's perfect."

In front of them, a woman is stepping out of her shorts. One side of her bathing suit is unceremoniously wedged in the crack of her ass; she pulls it out with a loud snap. Her rear end is what Sandy calls "coagulated," a cottage cheese of cellulite, and, below it, spider veins explode down her legs, like fireworks.

"Do you ever look at something like that and think about how you could fix it?" Terri asks.

"The interesting thing is that the woman doesn't seem bothered by it. The people who come to me are bothered by their bodies. They don't go to the beach and disrobe in public. They come into my office with a list of what they want fixed—like it's a scratch-and-dent shop."

"Maybe she doesn't realize how bad it looks?"

"Maybe," he says. "And maybe that's O.K." He thinks about Botox and Restylane and lasering spider veins and resurfacing a face, and sometimes he feels like a conservator, like the guy he once sat next to at a dinner, who worked at the Met, touching up art works when they chipped or when the ceiling leaked on them.

He thinks about the time he volunteered to go on a mission with a group of doctors who were heading to an impoverished spot to do good for five days—a kind of spiritual recompense for the fortune that modern elective cosmetic procedures had brought them. He fixed cleft palates, treated skin rashes, gave routine immunizations. "I've heard of it," his mother said. "What's it called again, Doctors Without Licenses? Maybe next time you could take Roger—he's an excellent dentist. Everyone needs a good dentist, rich or poor. It would be nice if the two of you did something together."

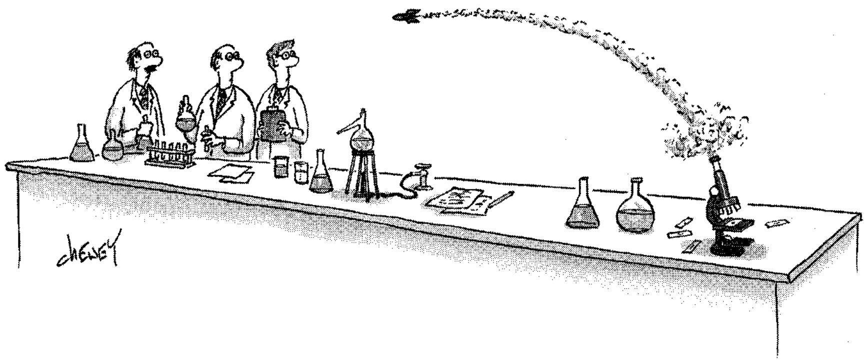
"Do you think he'd rather play tennis?" the friend asks. "Would it be more fun for Roger to play a round robin or to go out on the boat?"

"I have no idea," he says. "I'm not Roger."

"He always gets like this when his brother comes," Sandy says.

"Since I was five, Roger has been stealing my friends."

"Your friends are nice to him be-



cause he's your brother. Roger can't steal them."

"Roger thinks they're *his* friends. He tells everyone that he was my parents' favorite, that I was an afterthought, an accident."

"Were you?" someone asks.

"All you have to do is get through it," Sandy says. "It'll be over soon."

"Not soon enough," he says.

"You have nice friends. Who wouldn't want them?" the visiting sister says. As she rolls over, her top drops off. His eyes are reflexively drawn in—her nipples are large and brown, more beautiful than he would have imagined.

"Hey, there." A booming voice goes off like a bomb in his head.

"Roger."

"I thought I'd find all you flabby asses here. If it's Sunday, they must be at the beach." Roger smiles, his hundred-thousand-dollar smile. *Click.* Tom catches the poppy seeds at the gum line. *Click.* He's got Roger's pink shorts with embroidered Martini glasses. *Click.* Roger is wearing crocodile tassel loafers. "Tommy, can you put the fucking camera down and actually say hello?"

"Hello. Are you on your own? We thought maybe you'd bring what's-her-name, your hygienist? We were just talking about her."

"She's got her kids this weekend. Twins."

"Roger, come sit next to me." Sandy gives her chair to Roger and pours him a drink.

"Breakfast of champions," Roger says, sipping the mimosa.

"We were wondering when you'd get here," Tom says.

"I stopped to hit a bucket of balls. Oh, God," Roger says, "isn't that Blarney Stone?"

"Who is Blarney Stone?" the visiting sister asks.

"That rock star—what's his name?" someone says.

"Yeah, I think it is," he says, and now they're all squinting and staring at an exceptionally pale, skinny figure in a form-fitting swimsuit.

"That suit must have been made for him," Terri says.

"As skinny as he is, he's still got a little paunch," Roger says. "Do you remember how Dad used to do a thousand situps every morning in his underwear?"

"It wasn't a thousand, more like a hundred."

"Whatever. He thought of himself as a perfect specimen."

"Yes. And Mom used to say, 'Your father is a beautiful man.' It gave me the creeps."

Tom puts his camera back in the bag.

"What do you make of that guy?" Roger points to someone farther along the beach.

"Don't point," Tom says, horrified.

"Poliosis," Roger says.

"Actually, that's piebaldism—dark and light patches on the skin. Poliosis is the white forelock."

"Like Susan Sontag," the friend's sister says.

"Roger, what appeals—boat or tennis?" the friend asks.

"I don't know. Tom-Tom, what do you think?"

"Boat," Tom says.

"If brother says boat, I go with tennis. A word to the wise: never do what brother says." Roger laughs alone.

Tom stands. "I've got a headache. I need to go home. Go on the boat—the water looks rough, it'll be exciting—and I'll see you later."

"Should I come home with you?" Sandy asks. "Are you O.K.?"

"It's just a headache from the champagne. I don't usually drink at breakfast."

"I'll come with you," Sandy says.

"Don't," he says firmly, hating her because he knows she doubts that the headache is legitimate. "I'll see you later. We're all set for dinner?"

"All set," Roger says. "I made the reservation myself."

Later, Tom and Sandy argue about it.

"Of course I knew your headache was real. I offered to leave with you."

"You offered to leave because it was the thing to do in front of the others, but you didn't mean it."

"I'm not doing this," Sandy says. "I can't prove that I meant what I said. You should take me at my word."

"You think I'm faking a headache because Roger is here, but you're the one who brought champagne to the beach. Who does that, who pours people drinks at eleven in the morning when everyone is just sitting there baking in the sun?"

"Now you're blaming me for your headache," Sandy says. "Next, you'll say that I tried to poison you."

Roger knocks on their bedroom door. "Excuse me," he says, knowing all too well that his timing is lousy. "I forgot my floss. Can you imagine that, a dentist forgetting his floss? Have you got some I could use?"

"No," Tom says.

Sandy goes into the bathroom and returns with floss.

"Thanks, sweetie," Roger says.

"No problem," she says. Roger leaves the room. "Can we just stop for now? Let's just get ready for dinner."

"Nice that Roger picked the best place in town. Is he paying?"

"I have no idea," Sandy says.

"Do me a favor and don't do that thing where you order two appetizers and then I get stuck paying the same as if you'd ordered a rack of lamb."

"Am I supposed to order something I don't want?"

"In this case, yes. Order something to special-treat yourself. Have the fish."

"Why don't you just order two main courses? Instead of getting a starter, why don't you just leap right in and have a fish and a steak?"

"Because people would notice. They'd say, 'Oh, you should pay more, you ate double.' They never notice when you eat less."

"This is the least of your problems," she says, spraying herself with perfume.

Tom sits on the other side of the table, leaving Roger to the friends. When the waiter offers them the wine list, Roger takes it, studying carefully.

"See something appealing?" Sandy asks.

"The wine list is mediocre at best," Roger says, "but I'll find something. That's the true test, finding quality where there is none."

At the table next to them, an old couple are having dinner with their adult child; the couple are in their eighties and refer to each other as Mommy and Daddy.

"Daddy, what are you going to have?"

"I don't know, Mommy. How about you?"

"I'll have the snapper," the son, who must be sixty, says.

"I'll go with the sole, as long as it's not soaking in butter—it's not soaking, is it?" Mommy asks the waiter.

"It's perfect for you," the waiter says.

After the first course, Tom gets up to go to the men's room; one of his friends follows him. Here we go again, he thinks, imagining that the friend is going to show him something—a fungus between his toes, a ditzel on his chest. He doesn't turn around.

When they are side by side at the urinals, the friend says, "I'm leaving Terri."

"What are you talking about?" Tom says, genuinely shocked.

"I can't stand it anymore. I'm miserable."

"Is it because of the cancer?"

The friend shakes his head no. "Everyone will think that's why, but it has nothing to do with it. I was going to leave last year, before she got sick."

"Did you meet someone?"

"Yes, but that's not why."

"It's always why. Men don't leave unless they've met someone."

He shrugs. "Terri doesn't know."

"About the other woman?"

"About anything. I'm telling you first. I don't know what to say to her. We've been married for twenty-six years."

"That's a long time."

"She'll be fine," he says, "once she gets over the initial shock."

At the sink, Tom checks his face in the mirror. "When are you going to tell her?" he asks, watching himself talking.

"I don't know," the friend says. "Please don't tell Sandy. The girls can't keep a secret."

"Not a word."

And they go back to the table.

"Everything O.K.?" Sandy asks.

"Wonderful," he says, reaching for the wine.

"If you have a headache, maybe you shouldn't drink," she says.

"Trust me, I need a drink."

At the end of the meal, at the table next to them, Daddy is asleep. He has basically fallen asleep in his scallops, a dot of sour cream on his tie.

"Daddy," his wife says, waking him. "Do you want some dessert?"

His head lifts, as if he had only been looking for his napkin under the table. "Do they have vanilla ice cream?" he asks.

"We do," the waiter says.

"And what do they get for that?" Daddy asks.

"Six-fifty," Mommy says, looking at her menu.

"I'll have it at home," Daddy says.

And the son says to the waiter, "We'll take the check."

Roger pays for dinner, and they all thank him.

"You didn't have to," Sandy says.

"I know I didn't."

"You can buy them dinner, but you can't buy their friendship," Tom hisses into Roger's ear.

"Shall I drive?" Sandy asks.

"I'll drive," Tom says.

"You drank," she says.

"Not so much."

"Enough," she says, taking the keys.

Back at the house, Tom and Roger are having a drink in the living room, a nightcap and a cigar. Sandy excuses herself for a moment, and when she comes back the brothers are on the sofa, pummelling each other.

"What happened?" she asks.

Neither says a word.

What happened was that Roger said something like "Really too bad about Sandy. She used to be such a looker."

And, not sure that he was hearing it right, Tom said, "What do you mean?"

And Roger said, "Well, you know, she's let herself go, and I imagine that, for someone like you, it must be depressing. I never was all about a great figure or a pretty face. As you know, for me it's the smile—they've got to have the smile."

"I think you should leave," Tom says.

"Well, that would be awkward, wouldn't it?" Roger says.

"Not really."

"If I leave, I'm not coming back—ever," Roger says.

Tom is giddy with the idea but says nothing.

"When Mom hears about this, she's going to be very angry," Roger says.

"You're fifty-three years old and still threatening to tell Mom?" Tom says.

"Fine, you little fucker, how about I call your friend Bobby and tell him I can't go on the boat tomorrow because you kicked me out of the house? And I'll call your other friend and tell him you were staring at his wife's one boob."

And, with that, Sandy says, "Get him," and Tom punches Roger. "You ungrateful little . . . son of a . . ."

"Butcher and an artist," Roger says. ♦

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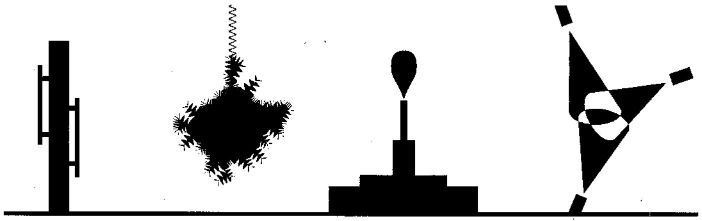


A CRITIC AT LARGE

TALK IT UP

Damon Runyon's guys and dolls.

BY ADAM GOPNIK

Popular fiction is supposed to be essentially story-driven; the proof that it works is the sound of the pages turning. But a few of the great pop writers were stylists, above all, and their success is measured by a different sound, that of the snort of appreciation followed by a phrase read out loud to a half-sleeping spouse in bed at night. The pages stop turning while we admire the sentences. Few readers of Raymond Chandler can recall, or even follow, the plot of "Farewell, My Lovely"—Chandler himself couldn't always follow his plots. What they remember is that Moose Malloy on a Los Angeles street was as inconspicuous as a tarantula on a slice of angel-food cake.

Of all the pop formalists, the purest and strangest may be Damon Runyon, the New York storyteller, newspaperman, and sportswriter who wrote for the Hearst press for more than thirty years, inspired a couple of Capra movies, and died in 1946. Runyon's appeal, though it has to be fished out like raisins from the dreary bran of his O. Henry-style plotting, came from his mastery of an American idiom. We read Runyon not for the stories but for the slang, half found on Broadway in the nineteen-twenties and thirties and half cooked up in his own head. We read Runyon for sentences like this: "If I have all the tears that are shed on Broadway by guys in love, I will have enough salt water to start an opposition ocean to the Atlantic and Pacific, with enough left over to run the Great Salt Lake out of business." And for paragraphs like these, at the beginning of "Lonely Heart":

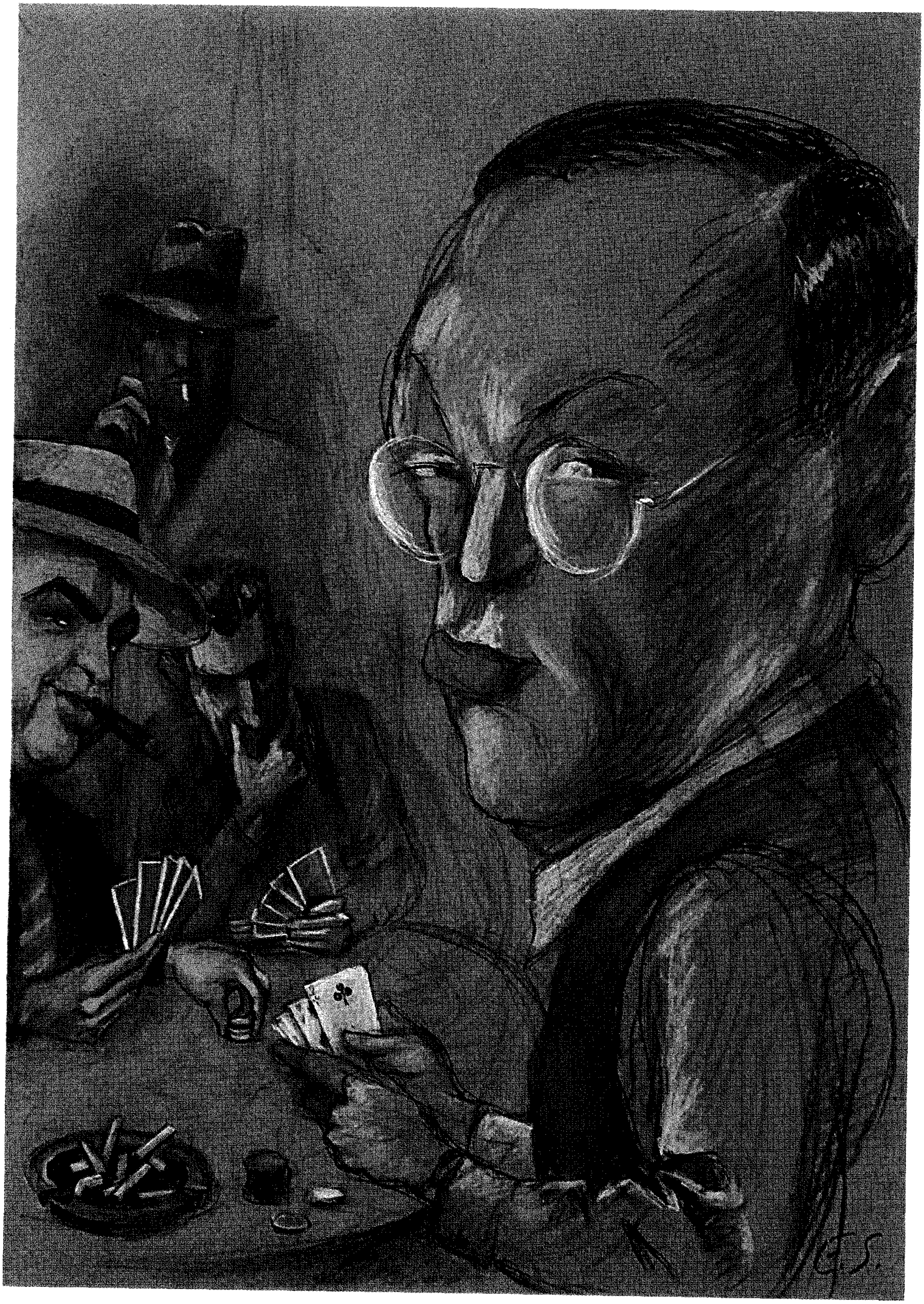
> It seems that one spring day, a character by the name of Nicely-Nicely Jones arrives in a ward in a hospital in the City of Newark, N.J., with such a severe case of pneumonia that the attending physician, who is a horse player at heart, and very absentminded, writes 100, 40 and 10 on the chart over Nicely-Nicely's bed.
>
> It comes out afterward that what the physician means is that it is 100 to 1 in his line that Nicely-Nicely does not recover at all, 40 to 1 that he will not last a week, and 10 to 1 that if he does get well he will never be the same again.
>
> Well, Nicely-Nicely is greatly discouraged when he sees this price against him, because he is personally a chalk eater when it comes to price, a chalk eater being a character who always plays the short-priced favorites, and he can see that such a long shot as he is has very little chance to win. In fact, he is so discouraged that he does not even feel like taking a little of the price against him to show.
>
> Afterward there is some criticism of Nicely-Nicely among the citizens around Mindy's restaurant on Broadway, because he does not advise them of this marker, as these citizens are always willing to bet that what Nicely-Nicely dies of will be overfeeding and never anything small like pneumonia, for Nicely-Nicely is known far and wide as a character who dearly loves to commit eating.

Here are all the elements of Runyon's voice: the perpetual present tense, the world without conditional moods, the stilted, over-elaborate attempt at precision, and, above all, a way of life and a social class evoked purely through vernacular. And then there is the unchanging, perpetually nameless and anxious-eager Narrator, with his warily formal diction and his cautious good manners—a born exquisitist telling stories at Lindy's, trying to define a chalk-eater while using the mild word "discouraged." The Narrator is, crucially, one of the lowest-status figures in Runyon's bicameral world, where the petty hustlers and horseplayers who haunt Lindy's by day are set against their sinister opposites, hit men and gangsters, who mostly hail from Brooklyn and Harlem and arrive at night. (The chorus dolls of the Hot Box night club move between the two.) "One evening along about seven o'clock I am sitting in Mindy's restaurant putting on the gefilte fish, which is a dish I am very fond of, when in come three parties from Brooklyn wearing caps as follows: Harry the Horse, Little Isadore and Spanish John"—that's the essential Runyon opening. The Narrator has to be careful; he is telling stories, often, of what elaborate politesse it takes to keep from getting killed, and his care is the source of a lot of his comedy. A wiseguy on the lower end of the totem pole is of necessity an expert in courtesy. (And Runyon's world, let's note, is not Times Square and Forty-second Street, where the kids and the grind houses and the freak shows were, but up at Broadway around Fiftieth, where the night clubs and the restaurants and the drugstores were.)

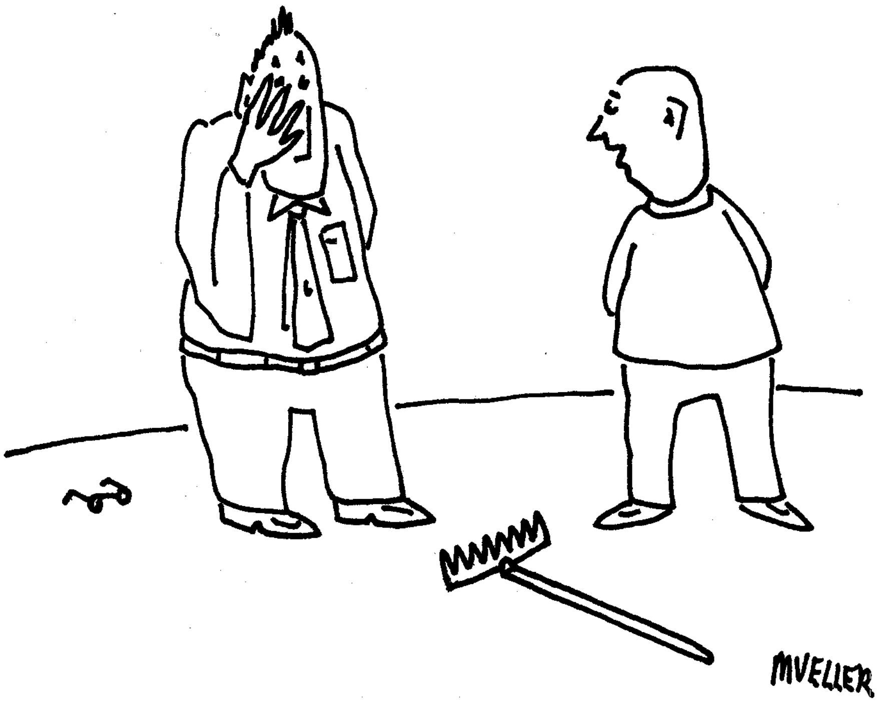
Even the best pop writer, though, needs a pop monument to be entombed within, or the odds are long indeed, as the Narrator would say, of his staying the course. Just as Chandler fans must be grateful for Bogart, Runyon fans have to be perpetually happy that the pure idea of Runyon, almost independent of his actual writings, produced the best of all New York musicals: Frank Loesser's "Guys and Dolls," which made its début in 1950 and is just now reopening on Broadway in a lavish and energetic new production. But then "Guys and Dolls" is so good that it can triumph over amateur players and high-school longueurs and could probably be a hit put on by a company of trained dolphins in checked suits with a chorus of girl penguins.

There is something almost mystical about how much of Runyon resides in a show that contains so little of his actual matter. (And, no surprise, it was a producer's wife's reading Runyon in bed that started the show rolling.) A device of the

Runyon's distinctive idiom—half overheard, half cooked up—captured a slang that yearned to be fancy, like two-tone shoes.



EDWARD SOREL; OPPOSITE: PIERRE DI SCIULLO



"You're not stepping on it right."

new production has Runyon himself silently haunting his characters and "writing" the show, which is generous but misconceived: the "Runyonesque" floats free, spectrally, above the real Runyon. As one of the show's original producers, Cy Feuer, explains in "I Got the Show Right Here," the autobiography he published when he was ninety-two, the idea was just for a Runyon musical comedy, his world and sound, with the specific story to be filled in later. What passes for a plot in "Guys and Dolls"—Sky Masterson's attempt to seduce the missionary Sarah Brown, on a bet—isn't Runyon's at all but is lifted from an old wheeze in a very wheezy old play called "Sailor, Beware!," while the subplot of Nathan Detroit's romance with Miss Adelaide was the invention of the director, George S. Kaufman. (Though, as scholars of such things might point out, Runyon's story of the long engagement of Hot Horse Herbie and Miss Cutie Singleton anticipates the topos.) The book-writer Abe Burrows and the peerless songwriter Loesser, meanwhile, made up all the actual lines and lyrics. Yet the ambition to make a Runyon musical was genuinely accomplished, suggesting that the Runyonesque bears a complicated, Holy Ghost-like relationship to the bones of Runyon's stories.

Though Runyon is still in print, and still read, he has in recent years slipped into the netherland of ancient boozy anecdote and old photographs where newspapermen of his vintage end up. He died when Jackson Pollock was already painting, but he feels as remote as Thomas Nast. The best book about Runyon is Jimmy Breslin's slightly dispiriting biography, published in 1991, one of those "matches" that make a publisher feel wonderful until the manuscript comes in. Writers train for one length or another, and Breslin's is essentially a series of eight-hundred-word columns strung together, all told in that good Breslin style, where this guy said that to this other guy—quick glimpses of Prohibition, the Hearst press, stealing coats in the Depression—so that the total effect is like watching the world's longest subway train go by at night. Still, there is something more in Runyon, one feels on rereading him, than just old jokes and columns and nostalgia for "Runyonland." Pete Hamill, another newspaperman turned novelist, has written a lovely introduction to the best current collection of Runyon, "Guys and Dolls and Other Writings," emphasizing the artistry that it took to make funny stories from the resistant material at hand. And there *is* something genuinely artful, not just artisanal, in his writing. Musical comedies work by creating circumstances in which people can sing their loves and dreams. A kind of love and a kind of dream, deeper than might be apparent, must run through Runyon's writing to make it sing so well.

By a cosmic coincidence, Damon Runyon was born in Manhattan, but it was Manhattan, Kansas—as though God were giving him the right birthplace for the obit but keeping him away from his true home until he was ready. The young Runyon actually grew up in Colorado, and stayed there until he was thirty. The Colorado-Manhattan connection in that period is so singular as to look almost significant: the newspaperman Gene Fowler, who was the prime historian of John Barrymore and the other hard-drinking upper-Broadway thespians (as they called themselves), came from there; and so did this magazine's Harold Ross, the epitome of a country boy landing a biplane on Broadway. If there's any meaning to the pattern, it may be that Colorado wasn't Iowa. In the tales about the early years of all three guys, there is always an emphasis on con games seen, card games played, a quarrel with Bat Masterson just missed. These guys are not farming. A newspaper-trained poker player coming from Colorado in those years probably thought of himself as cannier and tougher than the city slickers, who were there to be taken. Runyon had met Harry the Horse, or another version of him, before he ever got to town.

And then, just as it takes a naïf to find Paris cafés adorable—the natives find them about as interesting as diners—it took another kind of naïf to think that the lowlifes of Broadway were charming. (Old-timers tell me that the cheesecake at Lindy's was actually very gummy.) When Runyon at last arrived in New York, in 1910, it took him a while to find his way. He went to work for the Hearst press—not at the *Evening Journal* but at the *American*. It's one of those distinctions that seem slight now but mattered then: the *Evening Journal* was the popular screaming tabloid, while the *American* was Hearst's attempt at a quality paper. So Runyon started out on the higher side of the ledger already, and at the top, covering the New York Giants.

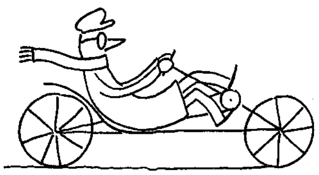
He began his life in New York cautiously; he planted his wife, who followed him from Colorado, in the outer boroughs, and fathered a couple of children in that absent and absent-minded way of newspapermen of the time. Baseball, already the sacrament of the tabloids, was where he made his first mark, and where he seems to have made his first distinct turn: he had come to New York idolizing the great and virtuous Giants pitcher Christy Mathewson, whom he had been writing about back in Colorado for years, sight unseen. Discovering that the real Mathewson was a bit of a prig and a bore—he could play and beat six of his teammates at checkers all at once, but then, Runyon noted, the teammates could barely tell a jump from a julep—Runyon decided to look elsewhere for his stories. He wrote about Bugs Raymond, the drunken, carousing hurler who was Billy Martin to Matty's Tom Seaver. Runyon pitched his tent on the shady side of the street, where the stories were.

It was only slowly, and over time, that he insinuated himself into the night world that he made his own best subject. His method was a simple form of Broadway Zen: he went to Lindy's, then an all-night Jewish deli on Broadway, and *sat*. "I am the sedentary champion of the city," he explained. "In order to learn anything of importance, I must remain seated. Why I am the best is that I can last an entire day without causing a chair to squeak." It seems to have been true; the interesting bad guys of that era—the Frank Costellos and Arnold Rothsteins—apparently didn't mind having newspapermen around who were listening, perhaps because they assumed from first principles that newspapermen were harmless and too intimidated even to need to be bribed.

Basically, Runyon spent the twenties absorbing the material he would use in the thirties. He had published some bad poetry in a Vachel Lindsay manner, and only much later began trying to turn the gangster-talk he heard into stories. But his ambitions were in place all along. This pattern—sportswriter into writer—was so familiar that it is easy to forget its peculiarities. The great American humorists of the first half of the twentieth century divide pretty neatly into newspaper guys and magazine writers, drudges for the penny press and hacks for the slicks, as they thought of themselves. Runyon, Lardner, and Don Marquis were all newspaper writers; Perelman, Thurber, and Benchley all magazine guys. What divided them was education and the felt experience of the Great War. Runyon's style, like that of Lardner and Fowler and Ben Hecht, is still rooted in prewar expectations. The literary manners of the O. Henry age—particularly the marriage of the louche and the lugubrious—lingers in his work till the end and gives it, along with its energy, a certain stagy quality. So Runyon, though dreaming of "real" writing, dreamed of it in a very late-eighteen-nineties way.

The key moment for Runyon occurred in 1929, after Arnold Rothstein was murdered in a strange, never quite explained hotel shooting. Runyon, as the writer who knew him best, or, at least, was his best listener, felt obliged to produce something, but couldn't find a way to get it out—until he began to write about the gangsters he had come to know as fictional characters, and, weird stroke of genius, as *comic* fictional characters. He saw that he could dramatize his accumulated experience of violence on Broadway if he made it funny. He sat down and, in longhand, wrote, "Only a rank sucker will think of taking two peeks at Dave the Dude's doll, because while Dave may stand for the first peek, figuring it is a mistake, it is a sure thing he will get sored up at the second peek, and Dave the Dude is certainly not a man to have sored up at you." The story sold to a Hearst magazine for the nice sum of eight hundred dollars. Others followed. Fiction was a way of putting funny hats on hit men.

Stories of this kind, the Runyon story, began to pour out of him for the next decade. Sales figures are hard to find, but it seems fair to say that Runyon became a more genuinely popular writer in the thirties than almost any other American humorist. His stories got sold to Hollywood for twenty films, including "Lady for a Day" (which was later remade, with Bette Davis, as "Pocketful of Miracles") and "Little Miss Marker," which made Shirley Temple into a star. Like Anita Loos, he got his first real dose of highbrow appreciation when his stories were published in England, in the mid-thirties.



Reading the thirties stories straight through, one is startled by the lack of characterization. Runyon doesn't really study gangsters; he just makes up a cookie-shape called Gangster and bakes extras as needed. The lack of sentiment and the love of language are what's new in his work. Where the other newspaper-made writers tended to be, as newspaper columnists still are, moralistic—Lardner, although a master of common speech, is intent on unmasking the cruelty beneath the cheerfulness of American life—Runyon's stuff is strictly amoral, with a tearjerking moment set down here and there like last night's carnation floating by in the gutter. No one grows or changes or learns, everyone's motive is mercenary, everyone is flat as a pancake, no moral drama takes place—all the life is in the language. Like Wodehouse, whom he in some ways resembles, Runyon inherited a comedy of morals and turned it into a comedy of sounds, language playing for its own sake.

That language still dazzles and delights. The usual thing is to insist that Runyon had an amazing "ear" for natural idiom, but, as Cy Feuer points out, Runyon's dialogue is essentially unplayable, too far removed from any human idiom to be credible in drama. What Runyon wasn't doing while he was sitting in Lindy's was just listening and taking dialogue down. Writers with a good ear (Salinger, John O'Hara) certainly listen more acutely than the rest of us, but what they really have is a better filter for telling signal from noise, and then turning it into song.

There are two layers of idiom-making laid one on top of the other in Runyon's writing, a technique that accounts both for its complexity and for its comic, slightly out-of-focus nature—for its mixture of authenticity and unreality. As far as one can tell, Jewish crooks of the period really did speak a surprisingly elaborate and cautious diction. They didn't speak like Runyon characters, but they tried to speak high for the same reason that they polished their shoes and tipped their hats and dressed in suits: fancy was classy. This tendency still shows in Sinatra's recorded speech, which, when made for public consumption, is extremely "high," a Hoboken boy's idea of a class act.

But with Runyon the crucial added thing, as Hamill points out, is that the Narrator is not just telling his stories but writing them. He's reporting a slang of the streets and writing a yarn at the same time. A whole second story of over-elaboration is placed on top of the already stilted-up vernacular, like one of those buildings on Forty-sixth Street where the ground floor is a restaurant with waiters coming in and out while girls in leotards work out in a dance studio on the floor above. The ever-blossoming additional clauses are most often the Narrator's idea of written language stapled awkwardly onto his knowledge of spoken language:

> Well, besides black hair, this doll has a complexion like I do not know what, and little feet and ankles, and a way of walking that is very pleasant to behold. Personally, I always take a gander at a doll's feet and ankles before I start handicapping her, because the way I look at it, the feet and ankles are the big tell in the matter of class, although I wish to state that I see some dolls in my time who have large feet and big ankles, but who are by no means bad.
>
> But this doll I am speaking of is 100 per cent in every respect, and as she passes, The Humming Bird looks at her, and she looks at The Humming Bird, and it is just the same as if they hold a two hours' conversation on the telephone, for they are both young, and it is spring, and the way language can pass between young guys and young dolls in the spring without them saying a word is really most surprising, and, in fact, it is practically uncanny.

The naturally exuberant street language ("I always take a gander at a doll's feet and ankles before I start handicapping her") always gets topped off by self-conscious writerly gestures ("although I wish to state"; "by no means bad"; "is really most surprising"). The Narrator's half-conscious knowledge that there are rules out there that you've got to respect leads him to overcompensate by respecting the wrong rules; that is, using formal diction where there ought to be vernacular idioms and vernacular idioms where there ought to be formal diction.

So Runyon's key insight into American slang is double: first, that street speech tends to be more, not less, complicated grammatically than "standard" speech; but, second, that slang speakers, when they're cornered to write, write not just fancy but stiff. In prime Runyon, the two sounds—street ornate and fountain-pen formal—run together into a single argot and beautiful endless sentences: "This Meyer Marmalade is really a most superior character, who is called Meyer Marmalade because nobody can ever think of his last name, which is something like Marmalodowski, and he is known far and wide for the way he likes to make bets on any sporting proposition, such as baseball, or horse races, or ice hockey, or contests of skill and science, and especially contests of skill and science." When Abe Burrows brilliantly recast Runyonese for "Guys and Dolls," what he did instinctively was to scrub off the second, writerly patina and keep in the elaborate speech. This approach worked wonderfully onstage, where we easily accept a stylized dialogue, as we do with David Mamet now. (In the movies, that arch-naturalist medium, it still sounds like too much, and one aches all through the Samuel Goldwyn movie of "Guys and Dolls.")

The other oddity in Runyon's stories is how startlingly they reverse the normal ethnic roles in American writing. The Bellow generation has made us accustomed to ironically distanced Jewish narrators of violent or extreme events. But with Runyon the controlling sensibility is that of the Gentile author expressing his wonder (albeit through the puppet voice of the hamische narrator) at the violent antics of the Jews. A parallel case is "The Great Gatsby," where the narrator is horrified and amused by the Jewish gangster Wolfsheim, and toys with and hints at the idea, never quite firmed up, that James Gatz/Jay Gatsby is not just linked to Jews but is Jewish himself. Runyon's characters are not just gangsters but mostly Jewish gangsters, as is the nameless but gefilte-fish-loving Narrator—the steady run of gefilte fish is in there to type him, as corned beef and cabbage might an Irishman—and their Jewishness is, from Runyon's point of view, part of the joke, part of what makes them comic-sinister. They're tough Jews but family Jews, too. A lot of the comedy in Runyon comes from having gangsters who kill their friends but don't like to disappoint their wives. One of the weirdest of all the stories, "The Brain Goes Home," tells of how the Brain, the gangster patterned on Arnold Rothstein, after being knifed on Fifty-second Street, is driven in a taxi from one of his Manhattan homes to another, where each of his dolls in turn refuses to take him in.

Runyon's simple love poetry, moony-eyed tough guys falling for calculating gals, turns out to be from the heart. With his long-suffering wife stuck out on Broadway and Ninety-fifth—Runyon was said to spend what little time he had at home picking out an outfit to wear to work; i.e., to Lindy's—he fell hard for a down-on-her-luck Spanish countess from Madrid named Patrice, who was, of course, actually an up-on-her-heels Mexican dancer from Tampico. She was twenty-six years younger than he was, and seems to have led him quite a life. But, miracle of miracles, she actually got him to leave his wife, and they were married—by Mayor Jimmy Walker, no less—in August of 1932, with the Depression falling hard on everyone's head. Walker fled the country shortly after, one step ahead of his own cops, while Runyon and his bride went off to spend their honeymoon in Los Angeles—he seems to have felt increasingly at home there—and then settled in at the Parc Vendome building, on Fifty-seventh Street, within walking distance of both Lindy's and the Hearst offices. Runyon resumed his sitting and writing life, and Patrice, as Breslin writes in a nice Runyon-Breslin sentence, "sat with him about as long as the form chart for these things indicated that she would." But he had his doll, at last.

A few years into the next decade, though, Runyon started ailing, from the smoker's throat cancer that would kill him. The doctors didn't have much that they could do, but did it all the same, slicing and cutting, leaving him voiceless. He kept on working through the end of the Second World War, and got to see his story "Little Pinks" made into the fine film "The Big Street." But by the time he died, in December of 1946, with a new population pouring onto Broadway, he already seemed to belong to the newspaper past.

It was two years later that the producer's wife looked up from her pillow and said that this stuff might make a show. "Guys and Dolls" is really quite late and retrospective—by 1950, Scarsdale theatregoers were already ruling Broadway—and the end of "Guys and Dolls," with the decidedly anti-Runyon marriage and reform of the guys, is a very fifties gesture. Television is already on its way in, and the suburbs beckon for Nathan Detroit and Sky Masterson. As the new production reminds you, it's the last real musical comedy, before it became all musical theatre. What lifts the show to something nearly perfect, and, though Runyonesque, on the whole richer than Runyon, is the warmth and intelligence of Frank Loesser's music, which is full of knowing ironic pastiche of things that were already long over—burlesque numbers and Irish crooning and a bit of Gay Nineties cadence—but also has a couple of ballads that take the most beautiful left turns in the dark. (Think of the second strain of "I've Never Been in Love Before.") Runyon's people are deliberately flat, like the paper dolls of the original production's poster; Loesser's songs give them heart, and another dimension.

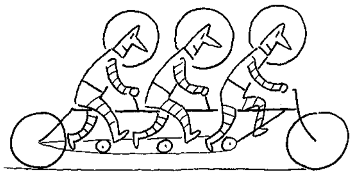
Yet Runyon remains a living presence. Writers with a great ear, like Chandler and Runyon, give us their words, but they also give us a license to listen—a license to listen to street speech and folk speech with a mind newly alive to the poetry implicit in it. One still finds echoes of Runyon's dialogue in David Mamet's. Mamet's ear, a thing of wonder, is not only as stylized as Runyon's but is eerily similar. One wonders, watching "Speed-the-Plow," whether studio heads ever really talked like this—until one grasps that Mamet's aim is to capture not their voices but their souls, the inner monologue of stilted present-tense self-justification, the slightly formal tone we all use inside when arguing in our own defense. Runyon's essential discovery was that the right way to get the soul of street-speakers was not to dress their language down but to dress it up. As much as American slang breaks toward the interrupted, partial, and incomplete, it also bends toward the fancy, overformal, and elaborate. Mamet gets this best, but Runyon heard it first.

And then there is something more in Runyon, something local, some energy on the page that still feels like it's ours, long after the last checked suit left Fifty-second Street. When he died, the story goes, they took his ashes up in a plane and sprinkled them on Times Square. A moment's thought about the reality of that—the plane, the aim, the height, the wind—tells you another truth. He ended up all over the island. ♦

BRIEFLY NOTED

The Women, *by T. C. Boyle (Viking; $27.95).* Boyle's latest novel takes on the architect Frank Lloyd Wright by examining his notoriously tumultuous relationships with four women, each unique in her own histrionic way. Narrated in reverse chronological order by a fictional Japanese apprentice, the book is extremely readable and deftly builds a portrait of the artist as pure egoist. Unfortunately, the novel avoids any sustained consideration of Wright's relationship to his art—a passion arguably more important in forming his genius than any of the women in his life were. Still, it proves an effective showcase for Boyle's own strengths as a craftsman. His prose is full of vivid descriptions and turns of phrase that pop with a preternatural precision.

The Way Through Doors, *by Jesse Ball (Vintage; $13.95).* In an inversion of the Scheherazade legend, the hero of this dizzyingly circuitous novel must tell stories all night to a beautiful amnesiac, to keep her awake and alive. He begins by explaining himself: he writes pamphlets (sample title: "An Inquiry into the Ultimate Utility of the Silly, as Prefigured in the Grave and Inhospitable") and works as a municipal inspector, in an office reachable only by ladder. His stories dissolve, unfinished, into other stories; characters—including a "guess artist" who reads minds with a thirty-three-per-cent accuracy rate, a girl who accepts only written communications (preferably typed), and a spurned Russian empress who forces her former lover to marry "the ugliest of women"—vanish and resurface; and reality is generally given the heave-ho. It's a thrilling ride through an alternative New York (think Steven Millhauser on acid), where the tallest building extends hundreds of feet below ground and cabbies are paid in gold doubloons.



What Comes Naturally, *by Peggy Pascoe (Oxford; $34.95).* This compelling history of the United States miscegenation law demonstrates its centrality to maintaining white supremacy in the century following the Civil War. Pascoe, broadening her focus beyond black-white relations, considers Western states' prohibition of marriage between whites and American Indians, Chinese, Japanese, and Filipinos, as well as blacks. She weaves a fascinating story out of significant court cases, including McLaughlin v. Florida, an often overlooked 1964 case in which a co-habiting white woman and black man were successfully defended. This case's use of the Fourteenth Amendment's equal-protection clause led the way for the Supreme Court's decision in Loving v. Virginia, three years later, that miscegenation law was unconstitutional. Showing how marriage law can reinforce discrimination based on what is considered "natural," this timely argument also has relevance for the current debate over gay marriage.

Street Gang, *by Michael Davis (Viking; $27.95).* In this history of "Sesame Street," Davis writes that when the show débuted, in 1969, the goal of its creators was nothing short of righting "the inequities in our society" through the education of lower-class preschoolers. Such populist choices as an urban setting, a multiracial cast, and a catchy brand of "edutainment" reflected both the mood of the era (it should "jump and move fast and feel and sound like 1969," a producer said) and painstaking research: a series of seminars held in the summer of 1968 was attended by developmental psychologists, television-industry insiders, and children's authors and entertainers (Maurice Sendak endured boring sessions by making X-rated doodles; Jim Henson's sandals and beard sparked fears that he was a Weatherman). The book's strongest sections are culled from extensive interviews with Joan Ganz Cooney, who oversaw production for more than twenty years, but the narrative loses steam once the show hits the air.

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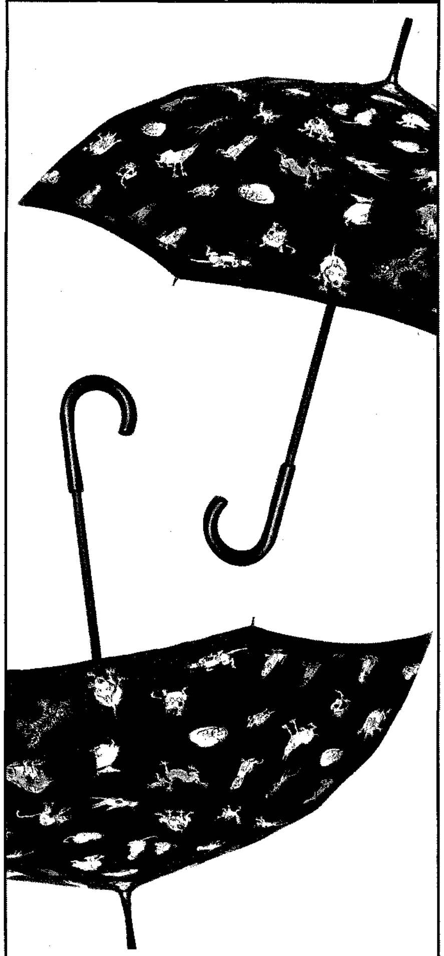

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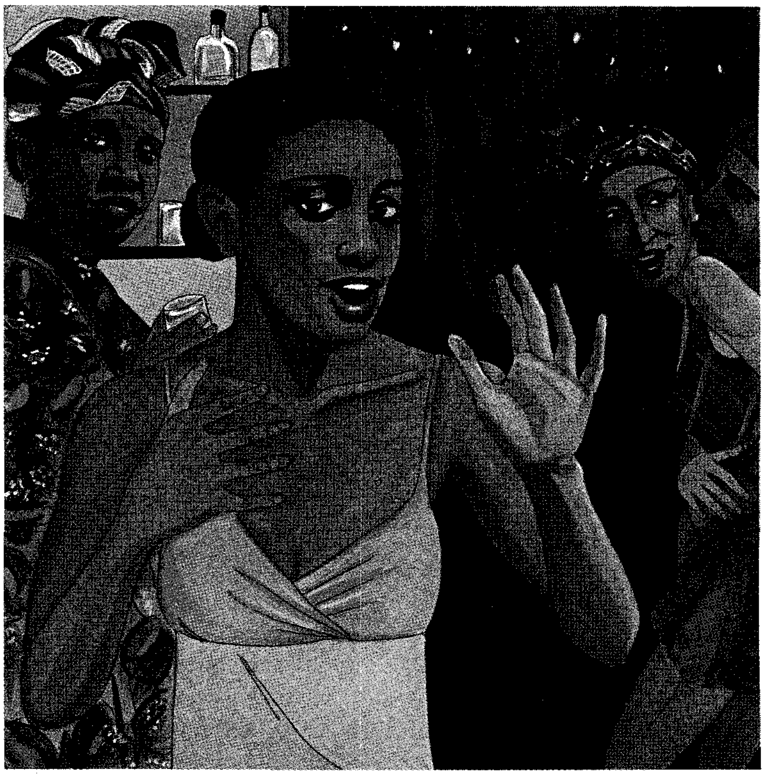
THE THEATRE

LIFE DURING WARTIME

Lynn Nottage on the wages of war in central Africa.

BY HILTON ALS



Chief among the many astonishments that the new Presidency brings to American culture is the fact that, with a strong black woman co-presiding over the White House, black femininity may break free, once and for all, from the notion of powerlessness; black female political strength may no longer be the notable exception but one of the shining rules. And if there's a contemporary American playwright who can manage a synthesis between the politics of the kitchen and the ways of the world, it's Lynn Nottage. In the introduction to her collection "Crumbs from the Table of Joy and Other Plays" (2004), which is reminiscent of Paule Marshall's 1983 essay "From the Poets in the Kitchen," Nottage wrote, "My plays were born in an orange-colored kitchen with a group of women seated around a mod Formica countertop. But my plays are not 'kitchen sink dramas.' My play-writing began inside my mother's gaze—that provocative way her eyes smiled after two glasses of Mondavi. Her gaze was warm, it was distant, magical, quixotic and at times even impenetrable." But it was another female relative—Nottage's great-grandmother—who inspired her remarkable 2003 drama, "Intimate Apparel." The time: 1905. The place: lower Manhattan. A black woman named Esther works as a seamstress, making "intimate apparel"—corsets and negligees—for a variety of women of different races and economic circumstances. Although she is in love with Mr. Marks, a Romanian Jewish immigrant who sells her fabric, Esther ends up marrying George, a Barbadian immigrant who courts her through letters while he's away helping to build the Panama Canal. Once George and Esther are married and settled in

Ekulona, Rashad, and Boothe as victims of civil strife in "Ruined."

New York, however, George turns out to be a philanderer who's more interested in Esther's money than in her love. (He's after her savings, which she keeps stitched in a quilt.) And when Esther refuses, at first, to hand it over—"No. That half my life. Thousands of tiny stitches and yards of fabric passed through that old machine"—Nottage reveals herself to be a true poet of the heartbreakingly mundane.

Nottage, who is forty-four, has a large, propulsive talent. She works in the tradition of Eugene O'Neill and Theodore Dreiser. Like them, she wants to tell big stories about America. Although her latest work, "Ruined" (at the Manhattan Theatre Club, under the direction of Kate Whoriskey), is set in the present-day civil-war-torn Democratic Republic of the Congo, its drama could just as easily have unfolded amid the gang wars of South Central Los Angeles. Mama Nadi (Saidah Arrika Ekulona) owns a bar and brothel in a small mining town. Her establishment has a thatched roof, tables and chairs, a radio. (The sleeping quarters are in the rear.) The play takes place in this small world, which both is and isn't cut off from the surrounding universe of rape and murder. (Nottage was inspired to write this play after a trip to Ugandan refugee camps in 2004.) Mama Nadi's principal aim is to make money. Like Brecht's Mother Courage, on whom she is modelled, she believes that, in a violently uncertain world, cash is the only insurance one can have.

At curtain's rise, Christian (the lovely Russell Gebert Jones), a thin, wiry, optimistic travelling salesman, asks Mama for a Fanta—a courtesy that she's reluctant to provide, since any hospitality she extends to Christian ends up costing her. Why should today be any different? It isn't. After indulging Mama Nadi's love of Belgian chocolates, Christian pleads with her to take in two young women who have been raped and brutalized by rebel soldiers, Salima (Quincy Tyler Bernstine) and the beautiful Sophie (Condola Rashad). Warily, Mama Nadi offers them shelter and something of a home. But they are required to pull their weight. Salima has to turn tricks for her keep. The less resilient Sophie is put to work as a singer; she is spared sexual duties only because she was permanently damaged by the soldiers who raped and mutilated her with a bayonet. She's "ruined."

Out of this despair, Nottage draws a unifying dramaturgical force: the humor in horror. And the actor who most fully embodies the play's tragicomic spirit is the phenomenal Cherise Boothe, who plays a young prostitute named Josephine. At the beginning of the second act, we see Josephine dancing licentiously for a group of soldiers. As she sways, her face flashes equal parts exhaustion, joy, pain, and degradation. It's a subtle, closeup-worthy performance, filled with such ugliness and such a profound understanding of the will to survive that one wishes Nottage had explored Josephine's story further.

Not that the playwright stints on character development. Nottage has a novelist's sense of pacing. (The play is too long, but you wouldn't want to deny the audience an ounce of its stewlike richness.) Unlike her fellow black female playwrights Suzan-Lori Parks and Anna Deavere Smith, Nottage is an old-school dramatist, charmingly unchic. She doesn't think of language as a meta-exercise—something to be played with, or picked up and abandoned at will. Rather, she is interested in dramatic unity: the tale and its inhabitants.

As the fighting outside the whorehouse escalates, Mama Nadi decides to save Sophie from further brutality. She arranges for her young charge to escape with one of the brothel's regular customers, a white man named Mr. Harari (the fine Tom Mardirosian). But Sophie misses her ride, and the soldiers invade Mama's place. Acts of bravery and desperation follow, as do speeches that are too self-consciously purposeful not to be corny. Still, we believe them, if only because Nottage does. When, at the finale, Mama Nadi shares a dance with a suitor, it is a gesture not of pleasure alone but of continuity: life can be halted temporarily, but not stopped. And as the couple twirls, with Mama Nadi holding back a bit at first, we are reminded of the many images we've recently seen of that other black couple dancing slowly, their belief in each other having similarly overcome all manner of obstacles, including the hatred of some of their countrymen. ♦

LARA TOMLIN

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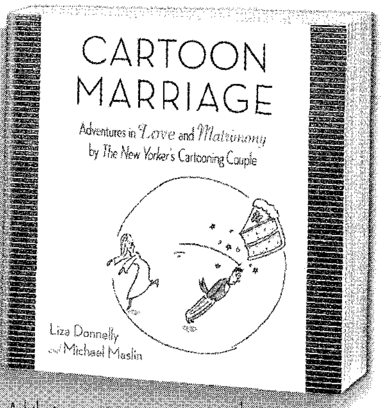
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JAZZ

A PASSAGE TO INDIA

Rudresh Mahanthappa chooses a heritage.

BY GARY GIDDINS

Jazz musicians have two fundamental goals: creating music that keeps listeners wondering what's next, and finding a novel context within which to explore old truths. (There are no new truths.) Whenever a musician achieves this synthesis, usually after years of apprenticeship and exploration, a rumble echoes through the jazz world. Such a rumble was heard last fall, when the thirty-seven-year-old alto saxophonist Rudresh Mahanthappa released an astonishing album, "Kinsmen," on a small New York-based label (Pi), quickly followed by another no less astonishing, "Apti," on a small Minnesota-based label (Innova). The breakthrough had been a long time coming, and, curiously enough, it justifies ethnic assumptions that Mahanthappa had for much of his career been working to escape. With a name that may require concentration (second syllables are accented: Ru-*dresh* Ma-*hahn*-tha-pa), he has often been presumed to be an Indian-born saxophonist involved in some kind of Indian-jazz fusion, but he is actually as American as apple pie, or Barack Obama. For more than a decade, in close association with a contemporary of similar background, the pianist and composer Vijay Iyer, he had circled classical Indian music with cautious respect, reluctant to exploit a tradition about which he knew little.

Born in 1971, Mahanthappa grew up in Boulder, in one of the very few Indian-American families there. He studied Baroque recorder for two years, then switched to alto saxophone at the age of eleven, coming under the influence of a teacher who exposed him to everything from Sidney Bechet to Frank Zappa. By ninth grade, Mahanthappa was fronting a band that, by his own account, tortured tunes by Charlie Parker, John Coltrane, and others he admired. He graduated from Berklee College of Music, and went on to earn a master's in jazz composition at DePaul University, in Chicago. Through the alto saxophonist Steve Coleman, whose M-Base collective inspired many young musicians in the nineteen-nineties, Mahanthappa met Iyer, and they could scarcely believe that there were two jazz musicians of South Indian heritage with routinely mispronounced names. They learned a lot from each other; Iyer focussed on rhythm and Mahanthappa on melody, and when they heard of an opportunity to play in Toronto they rehearsed for three days and made their début as a duo.

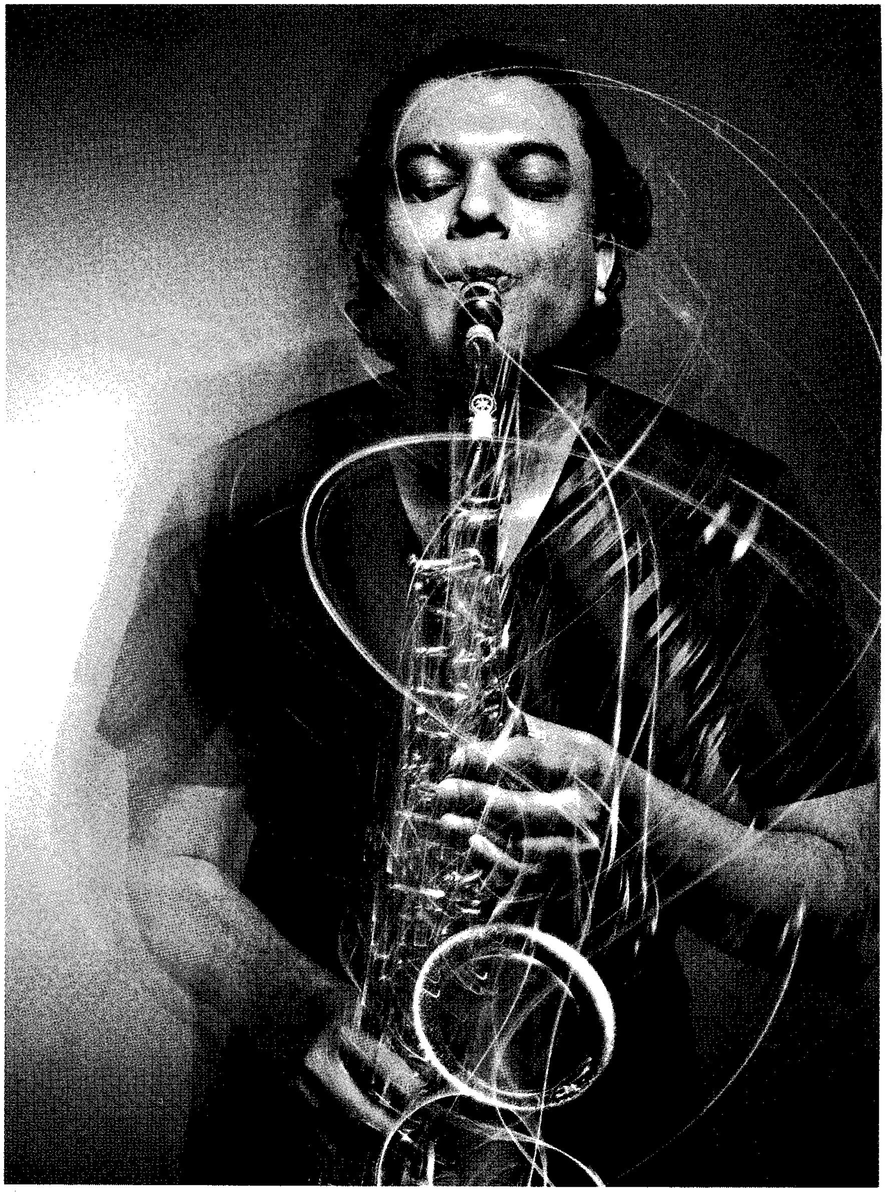
Both men were suspicious of the Indian borrowings that had become commonplace in jazz since the sixties, and which usually produced oil-and-water confrontations or mannerly gimmicks—a tabla in the rhythm section, say. Mahanthappa was also wary of Coltrane's use of Indian ragas—ancient scales that, unlike Western ones, are wedded to drones rather than harmony, which doesn't exist in classical Indian music—and of his attempt to invoke the sound of the double-reed *shehnai* with his soprano saxophone. Moving to New York in 1997, Mahanthappa performed and recorded prolifically with Iyer, producing an impressive series of CDs—including the duo album "Raw Materials," Iyer's "Blood Sutra," and Mahanthappa's "Black Water," "Mother Tongue," and "Codebook." To the degree that they borrowed anything from South India, it was subsumed by the sheer ebullience they brought to playing jazz—Iyer with his percussive attack, rangy moods, and fastidious wit (a recent composition is "Macaca Please"), and Mahanthappa with his lavish timbre, which places particular emphasis on the often neglected lower register of his instrument, and his ability to convey a state of elation.

While Mahanthappa was at Berklee, his older brother teasingly gave him an album called "Saxophone Indian Style," by Kadri Gopalnath. As far as Mahanthappa knew, "Indian saxophonist" was an oxymoron, but the album amazed him. Gopalnath, who was born in 1950, in Karnataka, plays a Western instrument in a non-Western context—the Carnatic music of Southern India (distinct from the Hindustani musical tradition of Northern India). Gopalnath, who generally plays in a yogalike seated position, has perfected something that jazz saxophonists have been attempting for decades: moving beyond the Western chromatic scale into the realm of microtones, a feat harder for wind instruments, whose keys are in fixed positions, than for strings or voice. Jazz players, such as Ornette Coleman, John Coltrane, and Albert Ayler, had gone about it by varying intonation, blowing multiphonics (two or more notes at the same time), or squawking in the upper register, where pitches are imprecisely defined. Gopalnath does none of that. Using alternate fingerings and innovative embouchure techniques, he maintains faultless intonation while sliding in and out of the chromatic scale.

Mahanthappa resolved to work with Gopalnath, using a grant to finance a visit to India. Then he immersed himself in Carnatic music, studying instrumental techniques, the infinitely complex system of ragas, and the talas—rhythmic systems based on repeated cycles of beats. Much as Dizzy Gillespie had wedded jazz chord changes to Cuban rhythms in the nineteen-forties, Mahanthappa wrote music that blended Western harmony with South Indian traditions, searching for a style in which American and Indian players might find a common ground without sacrificing their respective improvisational approaches.

Mahanthappa's collaboration with Gopalnath débuted at sold-out concerts in 2005 and 2007, and is documented in the spellbinding "Kinsmen." The album is organized around five extended pieces, usually preceded by brief *alaps*—rubato improvisations, generally played by a single instrumentalist. The opening one, "Introspection," uses three guitar tones as a platform for a seductively mournful Mahanthappa solo that exemplifies his ability to stay in tune while employing quarter tones and ferocious dissonances. It's a disarming introduction to the splendid roar of "Ganesha," a six-bar blues pitched in B-flat. Mahanthappa plays the main theme alone and then in tandem with Rez Abbasi, a guitarist from California with family roots in Pakistan, while Gopalnath and the Indian violinist A. Kanyakumari play a countermelody. Three things are instantly evident: the music is meticulously ordered; it has a massed density that suggests an illusory approach to free jazz; and it swings like mad. "Ganesha," like all the longer pieces, moves fast; individual solos are short, and are passed like a relay baton. Gopalnath and Mahanthappa used a traditional series of cues, and when Gopalnath plays a short riff three times it means that he is passing off to the younger man, who, quick on his feet, repeats his sign-off phrase and amps up the tension with a straight blues invention, accompanied only by the *mridangam*, a double-sided barrel drum played by Poovalur Sriji. When the traps drummer, Royal Hartigan, enters to back the guitar solo, he introduces a march rhythm right out of a New Orleans second line, and when both percussionists back the violinist the rhythm takes on a Carnatic intensity that inclines the listener to an upper-body response—more a swaying of the shoulders than a tapping of the feet.

Every track has equally fascinating intersections, whether deliberated or serendipitous. "Longing" sounds like a bebop ballad or the kind of tune that might have backed a sultry scene in a fifties detective movie, yet it is based faithfully on a raga and plotted with rhythmic vamps. At first, "Snake!" is the most traditional-sounding Indian piece, with Gopalnath, violin, and *mridangam* playing the melody, while Mahanthappa plays whole notes in accompaniment. But then an abrupt rest signals a shift for the Americans to take over for a wild couple of minutes—culturally diverse ways to achieve the appearance of complete musical liberty. "Kalyani" begins contemplatively and opens into fleet improvisations of uncanny speed and lightness. *Alaps* by Gopalnath and Kanyakumari are lessons in equilibrium, establishing the gravity of a central note and then going far off into space before returning, over and over again. Kanyakamuri imbues her instrument with vocalized emotions, alternately purring and craggy, building to terrific velocity. But the best is yet to come: the fevered "Convergence (Kinsmen)," configured on a twelve-beat bass line, with perhaps the best solos of the session—including an interlude with Mahanthappa accompanied by drums that suggests some of the inspired interplay of Coltrane and Rashid Ali, and a three-minute episode of exchanges between the two altoists that begin with eight- and four-bar handoffs and escalate to a delirium of echoed phrases, converging on a high D sharp—at which point you may realize that you've been holding your breath for some time.



Mahanthappa is wary of facile Indian-jazz fusions. Photograph by Ethan Levitas.

"Apti," a trio album by Mahanthappa, with Abbasi and tabla player Dan Weiss, is something of a sequel to "Kinsmen," and, with its sparer instrumentation, it also serves as a kind of skeletal breakdown, clarifying "Kinsmen"'s stylistic juxtapositions. The first track, "Looking Out, Looking In," is a brief invocation that starts off seeming Indian but ends up sounding very American, and steeped in blues. Similarly, if "Palika Market" favors the asymmetrical steps of the raga, the exquisite "Adana" is tempered by a cool swing feeling. Mahanthappa has said that he didn't anticipate the enthusiasm these albums have triggered and, with a long jazz career before him, hopes that audiences won't expect him to build exclusively on this project. His other recent playing—particularly on Iyer's album "Tragicomic" and in a trio with the bassist Mark Dresser and the drummer Gerry Hemingway, both veteran free-thinkers—should indemnify him from such pigeonholing, but "Kinsmen" is a momentous achievement that will be around for a long time to come. ♦

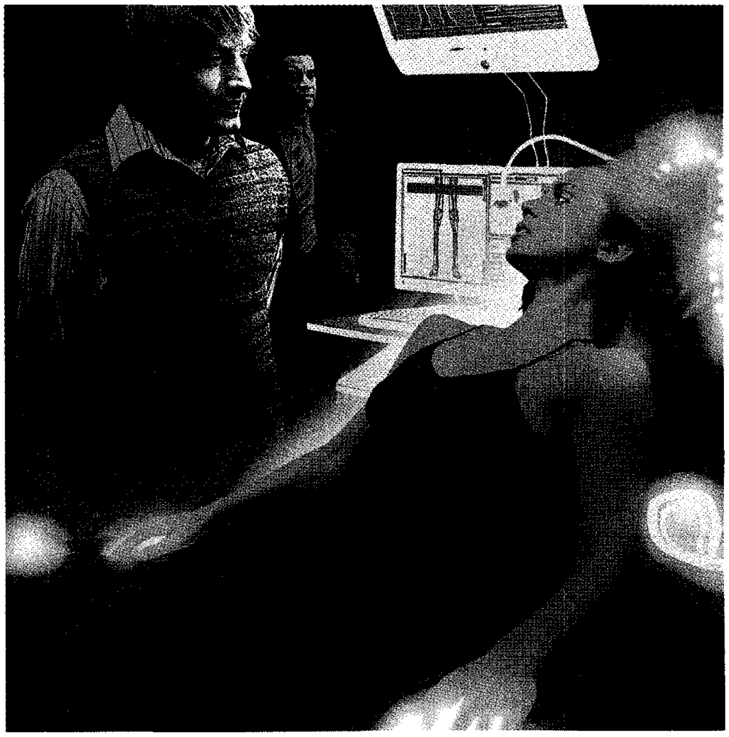
ON TELEVISION

WHEDON'S WORLD

A new show from the creator of "Buffy the Vampire Slayer."

BY NANCY FRANKLIN

Joss Whedon, the creator of "Buffy the Vampire Slayer," its spinoff "Angel" (which was co-created with David Greenwalt), "Firefly," and a new Friday-night show on Fox called "Dollhouse," has a fan following that is probably more clamorously devoted than that of anyone else in the business. In interviews, he freely discusses his creative process and his frustrations with certain aspects of the entertainment industry, and acknowledges the give-and-take he has with his fans, with whom he communicates far more than famous TV figures usually do. When you look into Whedon's world—Whedonians have a large footprint on the Web, and there is much information and analysis to take in—the image that comes to mind isn't of worshippers before an idol but of a chatty gathering of like-minded souls, who have come together to form a community. Which isn't to say that he isn't duly idolized: he is, after all, often referred to on Web sites as a god, and there are those who wear T-shirts to comics conventions that say "Joss Whedon Is My Master Now." Paradoxically—for Whedon is an avowed atheist—what they worship is his questing humanism.



Girls gone wired: Dushku, with Kranz and Lennix, in "Dollhouse."

SEAN McCABE

"Buffy" ended in 2003 and "Angel" in 2004, but the Buffyverse, as Whedon, fans, and scholars call it ("Buffy" has joined Madonna as a subject of study in the groves of academe), has survived in novels and comics, some of them written by the show's fertile creator himself. While those shows were still running, Whedon created "Firefly," a space opera-Western, which got yanked around by Fox, and then just got yanked. Whedon was nevertheless able to extend the story into a feature film—"Serenity"—in 2005. He used the occasion of the writers' strike last year to concoct a short, wonderful Web musical starring Neil Patrick Harris, Felicia Day, and Nathan Fillion, called "Dr. Horrible's Sing-Along Blog," whose impetus was in part the desire to prove that one could produce and distribute good work without the studios. Now, with "Dollhouse," Whedon is back on Fox, and the second time is probably not the charm. Only people who are willing to cut Whedon endless slack could find anything much to draw them in to this show, at least in the three episodes I've seen. So far, the vision, humor, and storytelling skill you'd expect to find are absent, and at the core of the series is an unpromising performance by Eliza Dushku (from "Buffy" and "Angel").

What seems to be on Whedon's mind in "Dollhouse" is the question of identity. Who are we, and who are we in relation to other people? And who are they? The "dollhouse" here is a facility—part laboratory, part corporation, part nefarious temp agency—where people's brains are electronically denatured and then reprogrammed with whatever qualities are needed by the clients who hire them. The head of this outfit is a cold, smartly turned-out Englishwoman named Adelle DeWitt (Olivia Williams); the equally stereotypical lab geek (obnoxious, no social skills, drinks from juice boxes, has a chessboard on his desk) who does the brain-draining and the reprogramming is named Topher and is played by Fran Kranz. Hovering around the edges of the action is an F.B.I. agent, Paul Ballard (Tahmoh Penikett, of "Battlestar Galactica," a show that Whedon loves), who can't persuade his colleagues that the dollhouse exists and that people are being used in this way—turned into zombies, then into other people, then back into zombies. When Echo (Dushku) and the dozen or so other dolls we see are at the facility, they spend their time getting massages, taking showers, and doing yoga—just like zombies everywhere. Trailing Echo wherever she goes is a handler, Boyd Langton (Harry Lennix), a former police officer whom we don't know much about and who is so concerned about Echo's welfare that, in this context, it seems suspicious.

What keeps the show from being too cartoony is the fact that the system isn't perfect; despite being built to order, the "actives," as they are called, have flaws. One iteration of Echo is nearsighted and has asthma, which affects her performance and puts a mission—"We prefer to call them 'engagements,' " the manipulative Miss

DeWitt purrs—and the company's huge fee, at risk. As Topher overexplains, making a superperson isn't possible: "Achievement is balanced by fault, by a lack. Can't have one without the other. Everyone who excels is overcompensating." And the deactivated actives seem to have a dim sense that they were once real people. In one scene, Echo, wandering around the facility, happens upon another woman all wired up on the table, getting shocked and making pained, somewhat sexual noises. (I turned on the closed-captioning on my TV to see how the sounds were described: "airy groaning.") Echo has a blank look on her face upon seeing this, but you get the impression that perhaps a germ of awareness remains in her. That's what you want to believe, anyway.

The problem with playing someone whose default setting is tabula rasa is pretty obvious, and the primary qualification that Dushku brings to the part is that she graduated with honors from the Royal Academy of Cleavage. In terms of gender studies, it is notable that Dushku's demeanor as a zombie is much the same as the demeanor many actresses her age resort to when trying to project an image of themselves as unthreatening and "feminine": a slouchy walk, a bobbly head, and ever-parted lips. Would someone please show these actresses a movie starring Katharine Hepburn, Barbara Stanwyck, Irene Dunne, Bette Davis, Cate Blanchett, Meryl Streep, or Judy Davis? Whedon wants to explore the farthest corners of our natures to discover what it means to be human. But this vehicle, which he created specifically for Dushku, doesn't seem fit for the journey.

Two weeks ago, President Obama pushed back the change from warm and fuzzy TV to bright and crisp TV by four months, so that the five million or so households in the nation without the right kind of TV set or a converter box wouldn't be left in the dark as we bid adieu to the analog signals that have mesmerized us for the past sixty years and said *hello* to all-digital broadcasting. The cost of the delay to the government and to local stations will be tens of millions of dollars, and yet it's hard to believe that the number of people who haven't got themselves up to speed will be much smaller by June 12th, the new deadline. Some people with old TVs (who need to convert the new, digital signal back to the old, analog one) can't afford the converter boxes; some are unable to get to a store or go online (sixty million American adults don't use the Internet); and some people, understandably, were confused by the whole process, so they put their fingers in their ears and went "La la la la la la la—I can't hear you!," hoping that it would just go away.

The transition was publicized for a couple of years, and intensively for the past few months, but, although the steps you had to follow to convert your system were not that difficult, they weren't quite easy enough, either, and there were too many of them. The coupon-distribution system was poorly thought out and inefficient (and ungreen—the coupons are thick plastic, like credit cards). To get a forty-dollar discount coupon, you had to request one, wait about a month for the coupon to arrive, and then redeem it within ninety days or it would be useless. You had to figure out what kind of box to buy—whether an eighty-dollar box was better than, or even different from, a forty-dollar box. And then you had to set it up, which meant that you had to go to that place where no one ever wants to go—behind the TV, a hellish domain of dust and hostile cords—and figure out where to put yet another cord. It didn't end there: some people got worse reception with the boxes, or fewer channels, and found that they needed to get new antennas in order to pick up the new signals. Given all this, it's surprising that more people aren't unprepared; and, given how expensive the transition has turned out to be, it almost would have made more sense for the government just to buy everyone new TV sets. There's another choice as well. Analog-set owners could follow the advice on turnoffyourtv.com: "Let your television signal die and explore the world around you. Wake up out of the TV-induced stupor and enrich your life with *real* experiences." La la la la la la la—I can't hear you! ♦

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THE CURRENT CINEMA

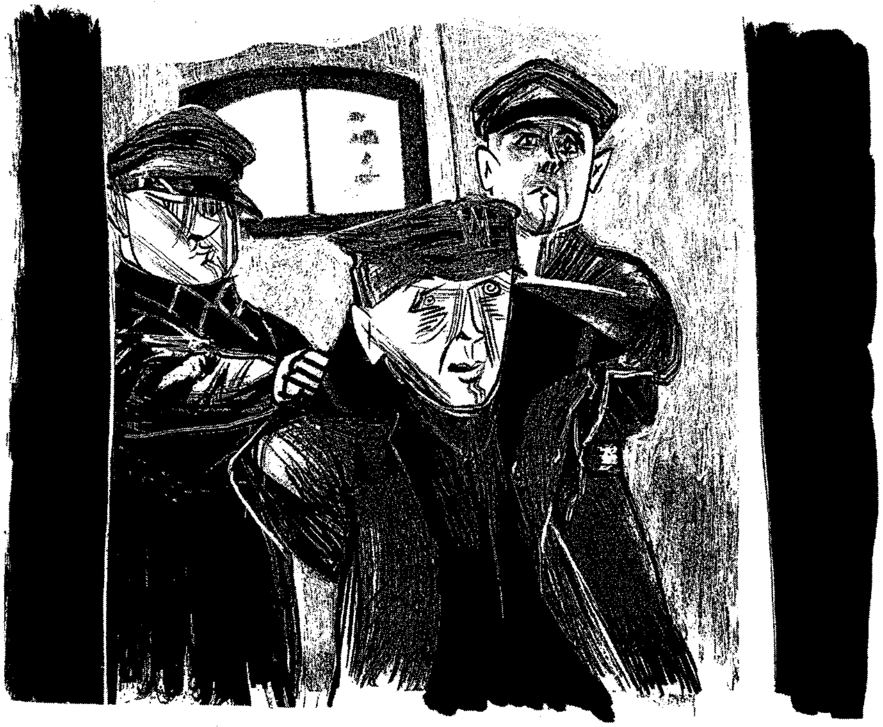
PARALLEL WORLDS

"Katyń," "Coraline," and "The International."

BY DAVID DENBY

I have been to Poland just once, briefly, in 1978, to talk about movies, but I kept meeting people there who wanted to talk about something else—the Soviet betrayal of their country. In particular, they were obsessed with a single event: the murder of Polish officers in the Katyń forest, near Smolensk, in 1940. For many Poles, the lies spread about this massacre amounted to a virtual negation of the country's identity. "Katyń," a stunning, epic film directed by Andrzej Wajda, is an attempt to settle the truth of the affair once and for all. In such films as "Ashes and Diamonds" (1958) and "Man of Iron" (1981), Wajda, who's now eighty-two, has dramatized the issues of Polish politics and national destiny, and at the beginning of "Katyń" he reminds us, with on-screen titles, of the twin events that turned his country's fate into a joke between two dictators. On September 1, 1939, Hitler's forces invaded Poland; on September 17th, the Red Army did too, and the country was split into two occupied zones. The Soviets then captured around ten thousand Polish Army officers. What to do with them? Stalin was murderously prescient; he may have anticipated the future of the war—the coming German invasion of the Soviet Union, and the Soviet recovery and counterattack, which, in the event, rolled through Eastern Europe—and in that future he had his own plans for Poland. During April and May of 1940, the Soviet secret police, the N.K.V.D., shot nearly all the captured officers—many of them reservists who had built careers as engineers, doctors, and teachers—and dumped their bodies in mass graves in the Katyń forest and at other N.K.V.D. execution sites. At the same time, many other Poles held in Soviet custody were also shot. In all, more than twenty thousand people were killed. Then came the second betrayal: during the long Soviet domination of Poland after the war, the crime was officially blamed on the Nazis. It's as if Poland's grasp of the truth had been taken away along with its sovereignty.

In "Katyń," after the opening titles, smoke and clouds fill the air, and the camera slowly moves through the murk and takes in a bridge filled with people converging from two directions. It is September, 1939. A group entering from one end is fleeing the Germans; a group entering from the other is fleeing the Soviets, and they mingle in abject confusion. Wajda's movie is based on a novel by Andrzej Mularczyk, "Post-Mortem," and it manages the feat of telling the story of a nation through typical characters who nevertheless retain their individuality. A captain, Andrzej (Artur Żmijewski), held captive by the Soviets, says goodbye to his wife; he keeps a diary thereafter, which occasionally forms the movie's narration, but he never fully understands what's happening to him. "Katyń" re-creates one of the everyday terrors of living under totalitarianism: no one in power ever tells you the truth, and you live on rumor and hope. The captain's stubborn wife, Anna (Maja Ostaszewska), longing for his return, goes to live with his parents in Nazi-occupied western Poland. Earlier, we had seen the Nazis arrest her father-in-law, a professor, along with most of the faculty of Kraków's Jagiellonian University—all the men, middle-aged or even elderly, hustled into trucks and taken away without explanation. Wajda goes back and forth between the sudden, stunning seizure of large groups of people and the intimate moments of companionship among their families waiting for news—any news. The scenes are curt, decisive, and unsentimental to the point of bluntness. "Katyń" has the severity of an old man's work—forceful plain statement and implication convey all that Wajda wants to say.



Andrzej Wajda's movie tells the story of the Katyń massacre, in 1940.

TOM BACHTELL

Once the Red Army kicks the Nazis out of Poland, and local Communists backed by the Soviets begin to take over, the new society forms itself, in part, around the Katyń lie perpetrated by the Soviet "liberators"—a lie enforced by prison for those who will not accept it. It is a situation of excruciating irony: at least part of the population agrees to the fiction in order to forestall still worse repression and to save whatever it can of Poland's integrity as a nation and a culture. "There will never be a free Poland," a bitter woman says. Wajda takes us into the Communist period, and only at the very end of the movie, as if recalling a nightmare that had been suppressed by everyone, does he show us what actually happened in 1940. The officers are shot in a basement, one by one, with a single bullet through the head, or pushed to the edge of a pit and killed there. The scene plays in virtual silence, interrupted only by the repeated pistol shots. Before it is over, we know that Wajda has made one of the movies' most potent evocations of a gruesome twentieth-century ritual; we know as well that only in a free Poland could he have created this particular spectacle. (The Soviets didn't officially admit the truth about Katyń until 1990, as their authority was waning.) Wajda has exorcised feelings that may have burdened him since he was a teen-ager: his own father, Jakub Wajda, a decorated fighter in the First World War, was among the officers killed. This tenacious artist has now given his father a proper memorial and has reasserted, with power and grace, the history and identity of his nearly effaced country.

A spindly metal claw, like a tarantula made of steel, squeezes under a door and comes right at you; hummingbirds hover before your face; a ride on a trapeze becomes a vertiginous swing into the depths. The animated "Coraline," seen in its 3-D version, now and then uses the third dimension aggressively, for nose-biting or swooping, but most of the time the writer-director Henry Selick, working from Neil Gaiman's novel, extends his reach into space as a way of increasing mobility and adventure—as a gift to imagination. There's a lot of barrelling through tunnels and dashing into rooms, and some very startling effects, such as when the heroine, Coraline (voiced by Dakota Fanning), a spunky eleven-year-old girl, is walking with an all-knowing cat (Keith David), and both of them are under the control of a witch who suddenly turns everything around them, piece by piece, into white blankness. All dimensions, it seems, can be erased. "Coraline" is a beautifully designed, rather scary answered-prayer story: the little girl longs for more attention than she's getting from her parents, so she enters a parallel world in which her parents are very attentive indeed—so attentive that they want to take control of her, sew buttons into her eyes, and turn her into a ghost child. All her neighbors are there, too, in slightly altered form, and the movie is filled with both sinister and enchanting transformations, as when the two portly, retired British music-hall performers who live in Coraline's house burst out of their shells of voluminous bosom and elephantine waist and fly through the air as slender, graceful young maidens. Animation is the art in which all wishes, sweet and sour, eventually come true.

The sleek, iron-gray thriller "The International" is the first of what will undoubtedly be a series of movies that melodramatize the banking industry as the ultimate in wickedness. The Luxembourg-based institution in the movie, known as I.B.B.C., and clearly modelled on the infamous Bank of Credit and Commerce International (B.C.C.I.), serves as a middleman in mayhem-producing arms deals, and buys off or assassinates anyone who tries to investigate its criminal behavior. Yet two virtuous people, an Interpol agent (Clive Owen) and a Manhattan assistant district attorney (Naomi Watts), refuse to be intimidated, and chase the bad guys all over the world. Killer banks may be new to the movies, but there's nothing else original in this if-it's-Tuesday-this-must-be-Istanbul thriller, with its portentous globe-hopping and racing through colorful street bazaars. And there's a big hole in the middle of the movie: the director, Tom Tykwer, and the screenwriter, Eric Warren Singer, forgot to make their two crusaders human beings. Clive Owen, unshaven and foul-tempered, stares and stares in outraged frustration, but not even this excellent actor and his beautiful dark eyes can create a role entirely out of wrath.

For those who like tony scenes of wealth, "The International" offers amusingly austere impressions of high-style skullduggery—men with closely cropped beards and perfectly tailored suits meeting in circular, sparsely furnished conference rooms and climbing into shiny black Audis. Yet one can't help feeling that Tykwer's visual panache is beside the point. The real-world bank story is about the banality of greed, not about murder ordered at the highest levels. For years, thousands of ordinary financial workers created, sliced up, and repackaged ridiculous investments, not in bursts of viciousness but as a careless exercise of avarice. No one, I imagine, will make a movie about that kind of banking, though I'd like to see Mel Brooks give it a try, complete with a male chorus, the Derivative Boys, dancing with a BlackBerry in one hand and shooting quarterly-statement airplanes into the audience with the other. ♦

NEWYORKER.COM

The Front Row, a new blog about movies.

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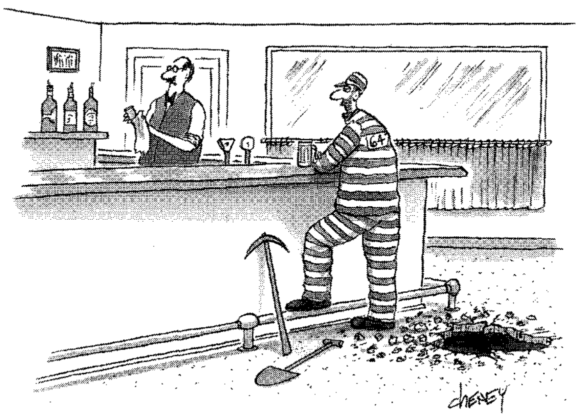
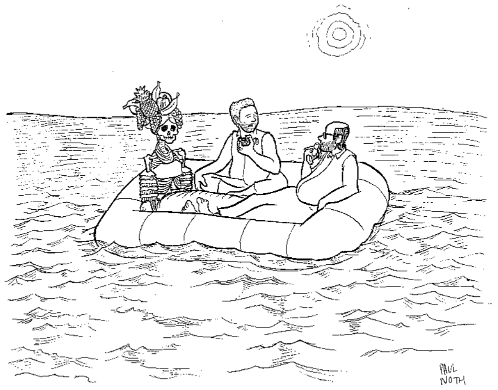
CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Victoria Roberts, must be received by Sunday, March 1st. Finalists in the February 9th & 16th contest appear below; go online to vote. We will announce the winner, along with the finalists in this week's contest, in the March 16th issue. The winner will be given a signed print of the cartoon. Any U.S. resident age eighteen or over can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit www.newyorker.com/captioncontest.

THE WINNING CAPTION



"Most men drink to escape. I escape to drink."
Douglas Buck, Flint, Mich.



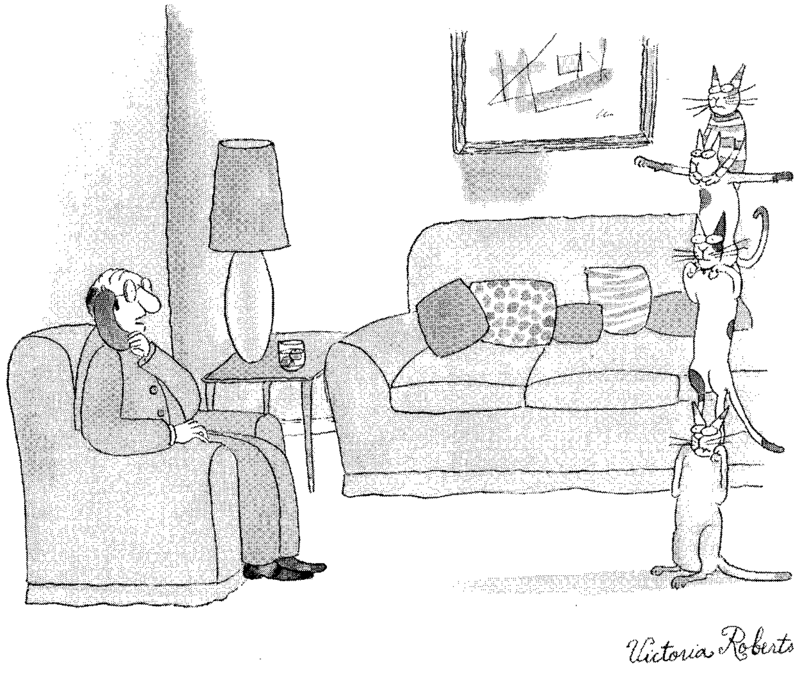
THE FINALISTS

"Here's to Little Miss 'Don't You Touch My Hat.'"
Kevin Forhan, Seattle, Wash.

"She should have told us the fruit was real."
T. J. Tu, Douglaston, N.Y.

"I didn't expect to gain weight on this cruise."
Andrea B. Hollingshead, Manhattan Beach, Calif.

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



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Simple Truth: It's important to keep an eye on costs

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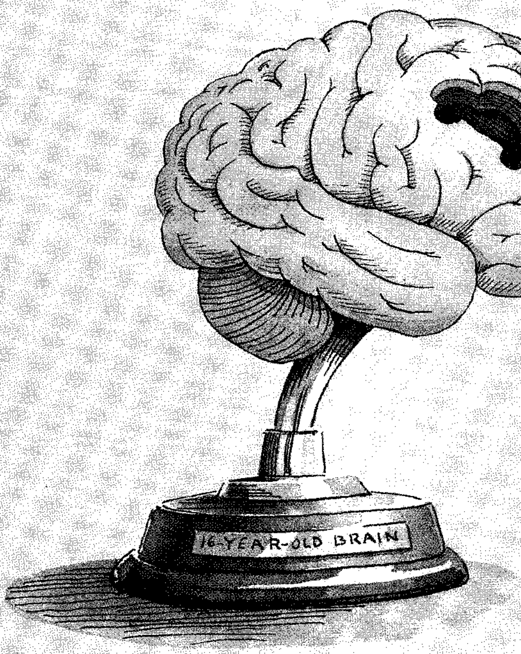
Why do most 16-year-olds drive like they're missing a part of their brain?

BECAUSE THEY ARE.



Even bright, mature teenagers sometimes do things that are "stupid."

But when that happens, it's not really their fault. It's because their brain hasn't finished developing. The underdeveloped area is called the dorsal lateral prefrontal cortex. It plays a critical role in decision making, problem solving and understanding future consequences of today's actions. Problem is, it won't be fully mature until they're into their 20s.

It's one reason 16-year-old drivers have crash rates three times higher than 17-year-olds and five times higher than 18-year-olds. Is there a way for teens to get their driving experience more safely — giving their brains time to mature as completely as their bodies? **Allstate thinks so.**

STRENGTHEN GRADUATED DRIVER LICENSING (GDL) LAWS.

GDL laws put limitations on teen driving so kids can gain experience safely. Since North Carolina implemented one of the most comprehensive GDL laws in the country, it has seen a 25% decline in crashes involving 16-year-olds.

HAVE THE DRIVING TALK.

75% of teens surveyed said their parents would be the best influence in getting them to drive more safely. The Allstate Parent-Teen Driving Contract can help start the conversation. **Contact an Allstate Agent to get a free copy or visit Allstate.com/teen for the interactive contract.**

Let's help our teenagers not miss out on tomorrow just because they have something missing today.

It's time to make the world a safer place to drive. That's Allstate's Stand.

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Sources: National Science Teacher Association, 2007; U.S. Department of Transportation National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, 2007; The Allstate Foundation Report on Teen Driving, 2005.

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